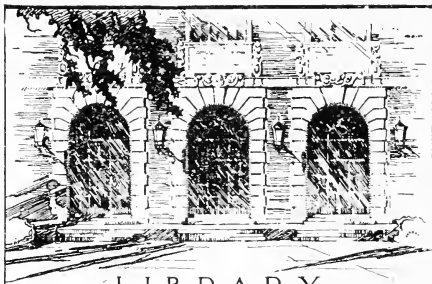


A CUMBERER OF THE GROUND.

CONSTANCE SMITH.



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A CUMBERER OF THE GROUND

*"There are some whose destiny it is to finish nothing;
to leave the feast on the table, and all
the edges of life ragged."*

A CUMBERER OF THE GROUND

BY

CONSTANCE SMITH

AUTHOR OF "THE REPENTANCE OF PAUL WENTWORTH"
"THE RIDDLE OF LAWRENCE HAVILAND" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

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PART I—(*continued*)

“One choice

We have, to live and do just deeds and die.”

CHAPTER IX

FROM PICCADILLY TO WESTMINSTER

"With me, faith means perpetual unbelief kept quiet."

JUNE is past ; July also. It is August—not the rich golden August of the country, with its fiery noons and cool, still nights, its pleasant prospects of ripe cornfields and laden orchards, but August in London ; airless, cloudy, depressing ; August brooding over the great city as a canopy of heavy yellow haze, and sending its attendant dust into every crevice and cranny, to make the face of all household gods—not white, but sadly grimy. The grass in the parks is burnt a sickly buff-colour ; the trees have long ceased to present even an apology for greenness ; the gorgeous array of flowers stretching from the Marble Arch to Hyde Park Corner is only kept brilliant by dint of unwearied and copious watering. Closely examined, the plants look as languid as the few passers-by who halt occasionally to glance at their artificially-preserved beauty.

These passers-by are mostly of the humbler sort, for every one who can, by hook or crook, contrive to leave the dull-burning furnace to which "Town"—so lively a month ago—is now reduced, has fled away to the country, the Continent, or the seaside; and the West End consequently displays a monotonous sequence of closed shutters and lowered blinds.

James Travers—flying along Piccadilly with his head down, at his customary pace of something over four miles an hour—may therefore be easily excused his start of astonishment on hearing a familiar voice at his elbow inquire sarcastically—

"Are you going to cut me altogether?"

"Lyon! I didn't see you. Where on earth did you spring from? And how comes it to pass that you are perambulating Piccadilly at this season, you man of fashion?"

"In order to sustain that character, I ought to answer, I suppose, that I am only 'passing through.' Unfortunately, that would be hardly a veracious answer. I came up from Yorkshire last week, and I've been rather at a loss what to do with myself since, to tell the truth. Good luck, our meeting like this! The sight of a familiar face is as a cup of cold water to a man in this hot desert. Come in and lunch with me."

"Thanks—impossible. I'm only in town for a few hours on necessary business; on my way

to Whitehall now—with no time to lose, for I must catch the 4.10 down-train, whatever happens. My mother is ill,” Travers added, in brief explanation, as he prepared to move on.

“I’ll walk with you,” Lyon said, suiting the action to the word. “Mrs. Travers’ illness is not serious, I hope?”—as the two pursued their way.

“Very serious—so we fear. Her condition has been more or less precarious for years, and now there is a fresh complication, which seems as though it must prove too much for her strength. My father is in great distress, and I am anxious not to leave him alone longer than I can help. Dorothy, of course, has her hands full looking after my mother.”

“Then Miss Temple is— Then your sister is not at home?”

“Not as yet.” Travers frowned unconsciously. “She hasn’t appeared to grasp the gravity of the situation, so far. My fault, probably. I’m a wretched letter-writer at all times, and of course I didn’t want to alarm her unduly—perhaps I softened things down too much. She knew, besides, that Dorothy was on the spot, and would do her best. Not a bad best, either. The girl has proved herself a born nurse.”

“That is fortunate.”

“Very fortunate. Indeed, I don’t know what we should have done without her. My only

fear is lest she should break down under the prolonged strain; my mother will hardly let her out of her sight for a moment. It's curious how she clings to the girl! You remember, perhaps, I told you there had been a little coolness between them of late? That seems wholly forgotten, the very memory of it wiped out."

"I hope Miss Travers will be able to go down with you," Lyon said. The news of the *rapprochement* between Mrs. Travers and her young cousin was not welcome news to him by any means. It aroused in him—he could hardly have told why—a vague apprehension.

"Oh, she must!" responded Miss Travers' brother, with decision. "I shall make it clear to her that it is her duty to go. Do you mind coming into the Stores for a moment? I telegraphed to Isabel to meet me there at two."

Isabel was in waiting at the Stores—not in the best of humours. "Your telegram quite frightened me," she said, with some indignation, to James, when her first inquiries had elicited the fact that no special change had taken place in her mother's condition. "I thought you had some awful tidings to communicate—and I gave up a meeting (a most important meeting in every way) to come here. I wonder"—looking at her watch—"if I could possibly get down to Victoria Street in a hansom before that last resolution comes on for discussion? There are

one or two amendments which ought really to be pressed, and I know, if I am not there, they will be allowed to drop."

"Well, I'm afraid you must let them drop," returned James drily. "I want you to come down with me to Heyford by the 4.10 train."

"This afternoon? Oh, Jem, out of the question! You don't know all I have to arrange before I can get away for so much as a single night from town."

"When it's a question of nursing your sick mother"—

"But I can't nurse! You know I can't!" interrupted Isabel. "I should drive mother wild if I approached her, when she is in one of her spasms. My very voice irritates her nerves at those times. Dorothy is much better fitted to take care of her than I. Isn't it curious, Mr. Lyon," appealing to the calmly-observant spectator of the foregoing scene, "that men always imagine a woman can nurse—and cook—if only she will take pains enough? As if nursing and cooking capabilities weren't just as much a matter of natural endowment as a singing ear, or an eye for colour!"

"We will leave the question of your nursing capabilities altogether out of court, if you wish," Travers put in—sparing Lyon all reply. "Let it be granted that you are of no use whatever in a sick-room, and that Dorothy can (and does) more than supply your place at home, as far as

actual nursing is concerned. Still, she is not, for all that, our mother's daughter. You don't seem to take in that the case is a grave one."

"You wrote yesterday that there was 'no immediate danger,'" retorted Miss Travers—speaking a little shamefacedly, however.

"And I say the same thing to-day. I believe there *is* no immediate danger. But the danger may become immediate, without much warning, at any time. I think we have discussed this question long enough, Isabel."

"Well,"—grudgingly,—"I'll see if I can make arrangements to go down with you. But I'm afraid it's hardly possible. I have to find substitutes to do my work while I'm away—and that takes time. Then there's the Women's Suffrage Association meeting to-night; I was to have seconded the first resolution, and I don't know of any speaker to take my place. But one thing I promise you, if I can't get off to-day, I will follow you to-morrow. You needn't be uneasy; you know I always keep my word when I have passed it."

"Your sister seems to be involved in a network of engagements," Lyon said, to break the rather awkward silence that ensued when he and Travers found themselves again in the Haymarket, Miss Isabel having previously selected a swift hansom, and had herself driven off at break-neck speed to Victoria Street.

"Engagements that bar the claims of natural

affection, it seems," returned James bitterly. With him, strong feeling of any kind would always out; he was incapable of even attempting to play a part, however powerfully circumstances might seem to demand the effort of him. And, in the present case, Isabel had—to his mind—betrayed her want of heart with such cynical frankness, that the most astute special pleader would have found it impossible to advance an argument in her favour.

‘My dear fellow, when natural affection and one’s own supreme personal interest come into collision, natural affection—quite ‘naturally’—goes to the wall,” Lyon observed in his cool, level voice. “It’s one of the favourite modern hypocrisies to pretend that we attach far more value to family ties than we really do. As a matter of fact, clannish sentiments have had their day, and are out of date; but most of us are too cowardly to throw them boldly overboard. Miss Travers is honest enough (I admire her for it) to own openly that her work has a stronger hold upon her than any sentiment, that’s all.”

“Such work!”

“You consider the Female Suffrage movement unhallowed, eh? If Miss Travers were deferring her departure in order to take a Bible-class, or conduct a mothers’ meeting, you would be better satisfied?”

“No, I should not.”

"Then you're unlike most parsons—if their practice accords with their theory. Half the sermons I hear wind up with solemn exhortations on the subject of subordinating the natural affections to the claims of duty."

"Sometimes one has to choose between two conflicting duties—one higher and the other lower."

"And you would rank the Bible-class and the mothers' meeting among lower duties? Look to yourself, Travers; your sentiments are hardly orthodox. All the same,"—with an abrupt change of manner, if not of tone,—“I wish you'd go north and preach them to the people at Creyke. They'd make a more wholesome diet for pitmen than the counsels of perfection weekly discoursed up there at present—(I won't say to them, but to the empty benches intended for their occupation). If only parsons would be men first—and 'priests' afterwards!"

"You've been at Creyke lately?" Travers quietly ignored his friend's impatient exclamation in conclusion.

"For the last six weeks, off and on."

"What sort of village is it?"

"Oh, God-forsaken enough! Ugly, of course,—a mining-village must be hideous, I suppose,—and squalidly uncomfortable. And yet prosperous, too, in a sense: in that sense in which rumpsteaks *ad lib.* for the men and feathered hats in fearful and wonderful variety for the women

may be said to constitute prosperity. Appallingly dull. The popular ideas of amusement don't seem to rise above beer and pipes, with an accompaniment of free swearing — diversified by a weekly dog-fight, and a movable festival in the shape of an occasional row."

"There is a church?"

"A charming church—mediæval Gothic as to its architecture, and modern High Anglican as to its decorations. There is also a refined and scholarly vicar, who held forth (on the only morning when I had the pleasure of sitting under him) to the school-children, a few old women, and the benches I have alluded to, on—the duty of reviving the observance of the Black Letter Festivals, whatever those may be."

Travers gave his friend a sharp look, but did not take up the scarcely-veiled challenge thrown down to him. Letting it lie, he demanded brusquely, "What did you do up there yourself?"

"I? Nothing. I made a few humble suggestions on first arrival—on touching the inadequate way (so it seemed to my ignorance) in which the large families were housed; and another hinting that a reading-room, or club, or some decent shelter of that kind, might perhaps be acceptable to the better sort, who were not ambitious of making beasts of themselves every night—all of which suggestions were promptly quashed by my agent. He assured me that

the people were quite content with the present state of things, and I had much better leave them alone. When I expressed incredulity on this head, he invited me to go round the village and find out for myself."

"Well?"

"Well, I went, and found matters precisely as Harrison had said. So I 'concluded,' as the Americans say, to take my ticket and come back to town."

"Abandoning all your plans?"

"Certainly. Why on earth should I bother myself trying to elevate the condition of people who prefer remaining at their present level?"

"That they should prefer remaining there argues the greater necessity for your interference."

"From your point of view, I daresay. Not from mine. I've no commission to make my fellow-man either virtuous or refined against his will. If he likes to remain vicious and brutal, I'm not called upon to interfere with his preferences."

"That's a question. At least you are bound to give men actually dependent on you for every opportunity of rising, a chance to rise—whether they ask it of you or not—so it seems to me. It's a simple matter of duty."

"From your point of view (I say again) I don't doubt it. But then you probably spell Duty with a capital letter, and regard it as a fixed quantity—which is more than most of us

nineteenth-century pagans are able to do. That's why we all talk so much and effect so little. An open mind and a suspended judgment may be necessary to the true philosophic attitude; but, as far as my experience goes, it's not the philosopher who makes the best citizen. No, it's you fanatics—you fellows who are so cocksure of everything—who do all the useful work that's done in the world, to give you your due."

"And yet," said Travers, a fleeting but singularly beautiful smile illuminating his plain face for an instant, "you despise us for that same cocksureness!"

"No. Not invariably. Sometimes—more often than not—we envy you."

Lyon jerked out these brief sentences somewhat hoarsely.

"In that case, why not make some effort."

"To arrive at your state of mind? Ah, there are obstacles in the way that you know nothing of—you to whom belief in a supernatural creed is an easy thing."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Travers, in a tone strangely different from any Lyon had ever heard proceed from his lips before—"do you imagine, on your side, that faith is easy to *any one*? or that we, any more than you, are without our doubts and questionings concerning this horrible tangle we call life? Do you suppose the explanation of the mystery we try to believe in—and do believe in, thank God! in our better

moments—do you suppose even that explanation always satisfies us? If so, you are profoundly mistaken!”

A block in the street traffic had obliged the two men to halt at a crossing while Travers was speaking. Now, as he finished, they turned simultaneously and looked straight, each into the other's face—with a look that in its absolute frankness, its utter want of reserve on either side, had the force of a mutual revelation. It was as though the soul of each man had been suddenly laid bare to his companion for a moment. In that moment, Lyon had as clear a glimpse of Travers' passionate daily struggle to maintain his foothold on the heights of faith to which he had painfully climbed, as had Travers of the unacknowledged yearning towards the creed he could not accept, which moved uneasily beneath the surface of Lyon's pessimistic scepticism. A glimpse only; all was over in a mere flash of time, the shutters of self-recollectedness shutting quickly upon the curious double vision—which had yet lasted long enough to create the consciousness of a new bond between them—new and strangely intimate.

That there was anything incongruous in the fact of this singular revelation taking place on the crowded pavement of Whitehall did not suggest itself at the time, either to Lyon or to Travers. Lyon, indeed, reviewing the matter in cold blood later on, found something absurd

in this circumstance ; but the absurdity was not of a kind which afforded him much genuine amusement.

They walked on in silence after passing the crossing, until Travers, stopping abruptly at the foot of an imposing flight of steps, observed briefly—

“Here’s my office. Well — I’m glad we chanced to meet.”

“So am I. I hope you’ll find Mrs. Travers better this evening. Remember me down there,” Lyon responded.

He watched Travers run up the steps in his active, boyish fashion, and disappear within the great glass doors at the top ; then, instead of turning homewards, he prolonged his walk towards Westminster. He wanted a longer walk ; rapid motion would perhaps help him to shake off various unpleasant feelings aroused by his late unexpected interview with his friend. So he betook himself to the Embankment at a good round pace, and strode along in the direction of Sion College, a prey to uneasy reflections.

It was not the latter, but the earlier part of his conversation with Travers which had so disturbed, and was still disturbing, Lyon’s mind. The electric shock following on Travers’ heroic lifting of the veil from his own tempest-tossed mind had spent itself—so it seemed at least—in one strong thrill of mingled surprise and sympathy ; he put the thought of that moment

wholly by, and fell to considering, instead, the news that James had communicated on their first meeting, together with all its possible bearings on his personal destiny and interests.

One important effect on these it had had already, in precipitating him to a decision hitherto only trembling in the balance. When he ran against Travers in Piccadilly, an idea of going down to Heyford, and there making unconditional surrender to the passion he had been fighting so desperately for six weeks past, was but just beginning to take shape in his mind. He had suspected, indeed, for some days, that his conflict with himself would probably end in some such ignominious acknowledgment of defeat ; but he had been far from arriving at a fixed intention of yielding such acknowledgment without further ado. Now, however, that destiny—making use of Mrs. Travers for the purpose—had barred his approach to Dorothy Temple for the moment (for it seemed clear that he could not insist on her quitting her sick relative's bedside to listen to his wooing), he quite forgot that till he heard of this obstacle, he had never really settled in his own mind the vexed question, whether to suffer the door she had unconsciously shut in his face that wet summer morning at Owlswick to remain a lasting barrier between them, or no. He had now no doubt whatever of his own intentions ; he felt himself hardly used in being debarred for a while from carrying them out.

In his vexation, his sense of baffled purpose, above all, in the state of indefinite apprehension into which his knowledge of the renewal of affectionate relations between Dorothy and Brian Travers' mother had thrown him, he almost forgot to gird at himself for the folly and unreason of his love. His self-addressed criticisms had, indeed, been losing in force, if not in asperity, for some time past. He might word them just as incisively as ever, they had ceased to have their old tonic effect on his mind. It was in vain that he appealed to his past experience. Instinct—or the illusion of a passion which seemed only to grow stronger for the unmerciful discipline to which he subjected it—persisted in assuring him that in Dorothy he had lighted on a new type of womanhood, to which his past experience could apply no measuring line. Equally vain were now his efforts to analyse coolly this girl who had stirred his nature so inexplicably, to bring her individuality under a mental dissecting-knife, and pronounce triumphantly the absence from its composition of all those charms and gifts that could justify a man in setting his heart upon her. The time for scientific investigation into her claims on his regard was clearly overpast. As to the success of his suit, he was tolerably sanguine. He did not, indeed, suspect Dorothy Temple of being in love with him. But he knew—he had known all along, she being of an un-

guarded honesty and he a singularly acute observer—that from the outset he had aroused her interest and fascinated her imagination ; he believed that he could easily dominate her will. Love, with such a girl, would follow naturally ; he had few fears on this score.

Dreading no hopeless obduracy on Dorothy's part, and being a man with whom patient self-government had become a fixed habit, it should not (in theory) have been difficult for him to defer for a little the moment of taking formal possession of a kingdom over which he believed himself to exercise virtual sovereignty already. In practice, however, he found his enforced waiting on events singularly trying. If he had chafed, in anticipation, against any delay of his now settled purpose, as he passed along the Victoria Embankment that close morning in August, he chafed far more restlessly against the actual delay that ensued, as September passed into October, and still his purpose remained unfulfilled. For over his waiting—hopeful as, in one sense, it undoubtedly was—there hung the cloud of a scarce-acknowledged fear. He would not put it into words, would hardly even allow it to take definite shape in his thought ; but as a vague, formless shadow it haunted him continually. While he knew Dorothy day and night at the bedside of Brian Travers' mother, rest was not for him, nor a perfect confidence in the future.

CHAPTER X

UNDER THE CYPRESSES

*"But when my heart
In one frail ark had ventur'd all . . .
Then came the thunderbolt."*

POOR Mrs. Travers, like King Charles of mirthful memory, took—so it seemed, now and then, to Lyon's impatience—"an unconscionable time in dying." Not that he had any spite against the poor lady, or cherished an unholy desire to hurry her untimely from this mortal scene. He would have rejoiced sincerely to hear that she had been unexpectedly restored to health; at the same time, he was secretly of the opinion of a certain German music-master, who observed coolly of the next-door neighbour whose lingering progress towards the grave interfered with the daily practisings of his pupils, that "Persons who are so very ill as all that should either get well or die."

In Mrs. Travers' case the question of recovery was, after the first, scarcely even mooted; and

when, in the last days of October, her protracted illness found its consummation in death, her nearest and dearest had long been fully prepared for the event, and met it with that composure which antecedent expectation of such a calamity scarcely ever fails to produce in the sincerest mourners. Only the old Rector tottered beneath the weight of his loss, which had aged him—so his son wrote to Lyon—by ten years, in a few days' time. "Dorothy feels it greatly, too; all she has gone through has altered her considerably," James added briefly.

Lyon, pondering over this bald and unsatisfactory postscript to his friend's hurried letter, decided—though it was now the middle of November—to defer his journey to Heyford yet a little longer. To go to the house of mourning with a love-tale—to pour the pleadings of passion into the ears of a sensitive girl fresh from deathbed scenes, seemed to him the height of unwisdom as well as the perfection of bad taste. On the judicious choice of time and season the very success or failure of his enterprise might depend. With the prospect of putting his fate to the touch actually close at hand, Lyon, it will be observed, had grown less confident in his own power to achieve victory.

So convinced was he of the need of proceeding cautiously, that it was only on the very last day of the month that he ventured to set out for Donnington. Noon on that day found him

stepping once more from an empty train into the bare little country station ; but this time he did not linger there, half-expecting the appearance of some one from Heyford to greet his arrival. He had taken good care that no whisper of his intended coming should precede him ; even refraining from writing (as for a moment he had thought of doing) to the nearest town for means of transport, lest by this means his project should get noised abroad. Unencumbered with any kind of baggage, he could, he reminded himself, easily walk the half-dozen miles dividing Donnington from The Haulms.

The road leading to that present goal of his desires presented to him an aspect differing most signally from that it had worn on the occasion when he first traversed it, in company with Dorothy Temple. Thickly carpeted then with white summer dust, it was now dark and miry with November mud ; at the end of a mile Lyon was already looking ruefully at his boots, and saying to himself, "A pretty sight I shall be by the time I get to Heyford !—hardly fit to go in. Probably her one desire, on seeing me, will be to get me out of the house again as quickly as possible, before I have hopelessly ruined the carpet in that immaculate drawing-room of Creighton's." Under the nip of a sharp white frost the previous night, the hedgerow oaks had parted with their last remaining dry leaves ; the beautiful overgrown hedgerows them-

selves, that had been so lavishly garlanded with flowers in June, were now mere tangles of naked briars, tipped with scarlet hips and haws, with here and there a clump of lighter-hued briony berries, or a melancholy trailing cluster of "old man's beard"; the fields, stripped of their very latest autumn crops, lay brown and bare on either side the way. Yet both the scene and the day had their own subtle charm. Deliciously mild, the atmosphere was full of that soothing softness peculiar to the air of a warm day in late autumn; the sun shone pleasantly, if hazily, out of a pale eggshell-blue sky; an exquisite stillness—restful, without being oppressive in its silence—hung over the landscape, and through it the commonest country sounds—the twitter of an invisible hedge-sparrow, the distant bleating of a far-off flock of sheep, even the ploughman's encouraging "chirrup" to his horses as they turned at the end of a newly-drawn furrow, and the cry of a boy on the hill-side scaring crows from the fresh-sown wheat—fell tenderly upon the ear.

Lyon walked on steadily, taking little or no conscious note of his surroundings, which yet were not without an influence on his mind. Only to him there seemed to be rather a suggestion of spring than of autumn in the calm, soft, quiet air. Everywhere he discerned, not evidences of "calm decay," but the germs of the new life to be—that same new life which had begun to stir and throb in his own veins so

lustily. After years of cold lethargy, he felt his whole nature once more thoroughly awake, all its sleeping powers roused into startling activity by—what? The mere unconscious touch of a girl's hand? Incredible!—and yet most true. Old ambitions, old aspirations, old plans and purposes were all reviving mightily in his breast. Already he had begun to ask whether he had not despaired of himself too soon? whether achievement, as well as happiness, might not yet be within his reach? Much time he had, no doubt, irrevocably lost; but something not wholly unworthy a man's efforts might perhaps even now be possible. Judged by the simple standard of her he had so strangely learned to love, his present existence, whereof he had never attempted to hide the poverty and the pettiness from himself, suddenly looked poorer and pettier than ever before; at all costs he would have to do better than *that*—since, otherwise, how could he possibly endure to meet the tender eyes that would henceforth watch his life from day to day—if all went well this morning?

He added this saving clause superstitiously, as a propitiation to Fate; for in his heart he believed once more that all would go well. On his walk, the confidence he had lost for a while had, for no special reason, returned to him in full force. The vague fears that had haunted him during the past three or four months receded into the background. What could Mrs.

Travers, he demanded scornfully,—Mrs. Travers, dead, and silent for ever with the silence of the grave,—do against him, living, and able to plead his cause in burning words? While she lived, he *had* feared her—he acknowledged this to himself; but now, he was surely more than a match for the influence that death had reduced to a mere memory. If his heart beat uncomfortably high as he rung the bell at the closed door of The Haulms, it was certainly not with fear.

The maid who answered his ring informed him—without giving him time to put any question to her—that Mr. Creighton was not at home. He had gone to London for a few days, she added.

“It’s not”—Lyon checked himself, remembering opportunely that it was needless to explain that his visit had in no case been intended for the master of the house. “Perhaps Miss Temple is in?” he suggested diplomatically.

No, Miss Temple was out.

“Do you know at what hour she is likely to be back? Because I might be able to call again later.”

“I can tell Miss Temple you are here, sir, if you wish to see her particularly. She is only somewhere in the garden; she told me she shouldn’t go farther, because she was expecting a poor woman to call during the afternoon.”

“Thanks,” Lyon interrupted, cutting short the worthy Lewin’s intention of inviting him into the house; “then I needn’t trouble you

further. I'll go into the garden, and find Miss Temple for myself."

He turned away, and strode round the corner of the porch, taking a path which led downwards to the lawn; leaving Lewin on the doorstep, somewhat scandalised at his airy waiving of all the usual formalities of a morning call.

No sign of Dorothy could Lyon discover on the lawn—nor yet by the river, nor in the shrubbery. He was beginning to fear she must have reconsidered the determination she had expressed to Lewin, when the happy thought suddenly occurred to him that it might be well to look for her in the Lady's Walk. He knew it to be a favourite lounging-place of hers.

In the Lady's Walk, sure enough, he found her, sitting at the far end of the old wall, quite close to the historic well—a slender figure, scarcely distinguishable, in her mourning garb, from the funereal cypresses overshadowing her fair head. Her back was towards Lyon as he came; and, the thick soft turf yielding noiselessly to his footsteps, she remained unconscious of his approach until, standing at her very elbow, he said, in a voice which nervousness only rendered a trifle deeper than usual.

"Miss Temple!"

"Mr. Lyon! How—how you startled me!"

It seemed that he had startled her indeed, for the face she turned towards him, as she sprang to her feet, was deadly white; and when

he took her proffered hand, it trembled palpably in his grasp.

"I—I beg your pardon a thousand times!" he exclaimed hurriedly, changing colour very faintly himself. "Your maid told me I should find you in the grounds—and I never thought—Of course I ought not to have come upon you so suddenly; I should have remembered you have had a great deal to try you lately. You are not looking well," he added abruptly.

"There is nothing the matter with me, thank you"—sitting down again on the wall with a suddenness suggesting that she found standing difficult. "I was only very much surprised—and then, perhaps, I am a little tired and nervous. We have had such a sorrowful time since you went away."

"I know," Lyon answered gravely. Then, after a moment's pause—"I did not like to write, to trouble you with letters. But I have thought of you—constantly—these last months."

"Thank you," she responded, simply and without embarrassment—taking his words, evidently, in their ordinary, commonplace signification. "I was sure you would feel sorry for us all."

The ring of this last sentence — wherein Dorothy seemed to identify herself more closely than he deemed at all necessary with the Travers family in their bereavement—displeased Lyon. Changing the subject brusquely, he inquired after James.

"He is very well. I suppose you did not tell him you were coming over? No, of course not, or he would have telegraphed to you not to come to-day. He is at Oldbury, for a meeting of the Diocesan Conference, and I'm afraid there's not the slightest chance of his being back before the middle of the day to-morrow. It is most unfortunate!"

It was on the tip of Lyon's tongue to say at once that he had not come to Heyford to see James Travers; but something—perhaps the unsuspecting calmness of Dorothy's manner—held him back from the frank confession.

"Such a piece of ill-luck!" the girl went on. "He is so rarely away; and I know he will be so annoyed at finding he has missed you. But perhaps you will be able to come again? Are you staying quite near to us?"

"I am not staying anywhere," Lyon returned, with an odd little laugh. "I simply ran down from London—on the chance"—

"Oh, but that is still worse! A long journey for nothing!—and, to add one more unlucky circumstance to the rest, my uncle is away, too, for a few days. If he had been at home, I am sure he would have begged you to stay here—for the night, at least. Poor Mr. Travers is in no state to receive any one"—

"I quite understand that," Lyon interposed. "And in no case had I any intention of spending more than a few hours at Heyford."

"Well, at least you will come in, and let me give you some luncheon?"

"No, thanks. I lunched at Malding on my way down, But I'll stay and talk to you here awhile, if you'll allow me"—boldly seating himself at a little distance from her on the wall. "And, first, tell me, how is the old Rector? Travers wrote of him as completely crushed."

"He is better—better, that is, than he was some weeks ago. But he will never get over the loss of her. It is as if half himself had been torn away; he feels hopelessly maimed, I think. And yet, as you know, she could *do* little or nothing for him—only sympathise—it is her sympathy he misses so terribly. One doesn't wonder at it. Their minds always seemed to move in a sort of harmony: it wasn't only that they thought alike—they *felt* alike, on pretty nearly every subject." She paused for an instant. "It was very beautiful," she added in a slightly lower tone.

Lyon made no answering comment on these words of his companion's. He was busy studying her face, noting the changes that had taken place in it, and wondering whether they portended good or evil to himself.

No doubt but these changes were both great and significant—so great as to startle Lyon, so significant as to render him uneasy. He had expected to find Dorothy looking paler and graver than in the summer, still bearing traces,

it might be, of fatigue and emotion ; but he was not prepared to find her grown, in the space of less than half a year, from the mental stature of a frank, light-hearted girl, to that of a sedate, self-contained woman. Yet to this astounding inner development—and to nothing less than this—did her countenance, with its new steadfastness of expression, bear witness. Also, there was now a spiritual beauty, a depth of tender thoughtfulness in her eyes which he had never discerned there before, and the discerning of which caused him (even as he recognised it) to assume a new attitude towards her—the attitude of humility. He knew now that, in any future joining of their lives, it would not be he who should condescend to her, but she who, from an altitude quite out of his reach and ken, would stoop to him.

While these thoughts chased each other through her companion's mind, Dorothy went on talking calmly of the old Rector.

At first, she said, the prostration, both mental and physical from which the old man suffered, after his wife's death, had been so extreme as to make him think seriously of resigning his living, and he had even taken certain steps towards placing his resignation in the bishop's hands. His bodily condition improving, however, he had promptly rescinded his resolution, and was now as obstinately determined to stay on at Heyford as he had for a while been eagerly anxious to leave

it. "I think it is a pity he should have changed his mind," Dorothy said in conclusion. "He is not really equal to any trouble or responsibility. And then, it's a little hard on poor Jem, who fancied himself at last on the point of attaining his heart's desire."

"What's that?"

"Don't you know that for years it has been his dream to join one of the preaching Orders, and go out to India as a missionary? A fortnight ago, it seemed as if the time for realising the dream had come; I know Jem actually wrote a preliminary letter to Father White, and ordered his Marathi and Hindu grammars. Then Mr. Travers changed his mind—I believe, on the very day the parcel of books arrived from Oxford. Was it not hard?"

"Very—since his ambition lies that way. How does he bear his disappointment?"

"Like himself—as being all for the best. He told me on Monday he was working hard at his Marathi, and he believed it was a capital thing he had been prevented going out at present, the delay would give him just the time he needed for perfecting himself in the language!"

Dorothy smiled as she spoke, but her eyes were suspiciously dewy.

"Happy optimist!" ejaculated Lyon. "No, I never heard a whisper of the missionary plan before. But, supposing Travers had been free to carry it out, as far as this place is concerned,

what would have become of the Rector? He could hardly have gone to India too."

"Oh, in that case, we should— No, of course Mr. Travers could not have gone out with Jem. But Brian—his other son—is coming home,"—there was a slight appearance of flurry about Dorothy's manner,—“and I think the Rector would probably have gone to live with him. You know he was always his father's favourite."

"Yes, I know," Lyon answered abstractedly, not much heeding what she said. He was considering how best to lead the conversation round to the desired point—which he rather shrank from attacking with absolute suddenness.

Dorothy, all unconsciously, gave him a helping hand.

"I wish Jem and his father had more ideas in common," she remarked meditatively. "It would make both their lives so much happier—Jem's especially. For the Rector at least has friends near at hand, while all Jem's cronies are far away. It is all the more tiresome that he should have missed you to-day, after your travelling all the way from London on purpose to see him"—

"I beg your pardon!" Lyon interposed desperately—feeling that now or never was his moment. "I really can't let you labour under a misapprehension any longer. You give me credit where I deserve none. I didn't come here to-day to see Travers. My journey was

prompted by no kind motive whatever ; it had a purely selfish personal end." He found himself getting curiously out of breath, and had to pause for an instant. "I came—can you guess why?"

She shook her head. But he fancied that he could discern a shade of fear sweep over her face at the same moment—suggesting that she felt vaguely afraid of what he might say next.

What he did say was very much to the purpose. "Well, it was to see—you."

"To see me?"

No question but that she was thoroughly frightened now. Fear had blanched even the lips with which she repeated his words.

"Yes." He rose and stood straight before her, upright and resolute ; clearly he meant to give her no chance of running away without hearing him out. "To see you—and tell you what I should have told you last June—if I hadn't been a fool and a coward. That I love you—love you passionately—as I've never loved any woman before, and certainly never shall again"—

"No! no!" she exclaimed faintly.

"But it is yes!" he retorted, with a half smile. "Surely you might allow me to know my own mind after nearly six months' consideration? I am not a hot-headed boy, remember. I'll be honest with you ; in the summer I was *not* sure. I thought—to conceal nothing—that I could live it down ; and I tried to live it down.

(You'll not misjudge me for that ; you know if I had reason to dread setting my whole heart on a woman !) But I could do nothing ; I was helpless as a child—I had loved you from the moment I saw you, I fancy, though I was slow to find out the truth. By the time I did find it out, the thing had become a part of me ; I could no more get away from it than I could get away from myself."

Again he stopped, that curious breathlessness once more momentarily getting the better of him. When he resumed, it was in a lower and less steady voice.

"I can't make eloquent speeches. I can only tell you, in the old hackneyed phrase, that you are all the world to me. But understand that I don't speak in a figure, please. You *are* all the world to me. Everything I fancied I had lost for ever—not love and happiness only, but hope and self-respect and faith in human nature—I have found again in you. Deny me yourself and you beggar me afresh—only more completely than before!"

Her face had changed while he was speaking ; a veritable glow of light and colour had invaded it. For a minute past she had been bending unconsciously forward, while her eyes seemed drinking in his impassioned words. But, when he ended, her colour died down again, and she drew back, shivering a little, into the angle of the wall behind her.

"I am sorry—so sorry," she murmured, almost inaudibly. "I didn't know—oh, I didn't know! And now, I"—

"Hush!" he interposed; "hear me to the end before you give me an answer. I know there's a great deal to be said against what I am asking you to do. To begin with, I am far too old for you—in mind and years alike. I have never in my whole life done anything that would justify you in caring for me; the chances are I never shall do anything. For my present manner of existence—you yourself cannot think it more contemptible, more unworthy of an intelligent human being, than I know and feel it to be. As to my past,—two or three years of it at least,—if I could bring myself to tell you of those years, you would probably consider me deserving only of the most merciless condemnation. And so I am. I offer no excuses for myself; I won't even tell you that I've been no worse than other men. In a way, I *have* been worse. So many men's sins are more or less involuntary—mine were always deliberate. Evil never presented itself to me at any time in the guise of an angel of light. I was simply reckless—because profoundly miserable—and wanted distraction. You see, I keep nothing back," he made abrupt comment. "At least, you'll acquit me of trying to deceive you—of making myself out any better than I am! I can truthfully say I have never done that, with

you. From the first, some demon has always been impelling me to show you the worst and lowest side of myself. And yet, if only you could and would believe it, even I am not all bad"—

"Oh, I have never thought so!"—eagerly. "Pray, pray do not imagine it!"

"It is something that you should be able to say even so much as that. Well," with a desperate attempt at lightness of speech, "I don't know that I have any further touch to add to the unpleasing portrait I have drawn. If you were not—what you are, I should feel it doubly insane *now*, after what I have told you, to ask you to stretch out a helping hand to such as I. But, you see,"—a strange smile quivered across his face,—“I know your passion for usefulness, for aiding any broken-down creature you find by the wayside—if only he or she is in sufficiently desperate case—and I think I may fairly advance that sort of claim to your mercy. If ever man wanted help, I do. Will you give it me, Dorothy? Will you?"

Dorothy rose quickly to her feet there. "Mr. Lyon, you must not go on. I ought not to have let you say so much."

"You must hear one word more before you silence me," he persisted. "Understand that, in my case, it lies with you—and you only—to help. For others there may be other means of redemption, other ways of struggling back to better things. For me, there is your hand to

hold by—or nothing.” She trembled visibly, putting her hand on the edge of the wall to steady herself. He drew a step nearer. “I don’t ask you to love me—though I believe I might win your love in time, perhaps; I simply ask you to save me. I don’t promise you”—still with a kind of perverse candour putting the case rather against than for himself—“that you will be perfectly happy as my wife; I am too little fit for you to be likely to make you perfectly happy. But this I can and do promise you: if you give yourself to me, what I give you in return will be nothing less than my whole life—to deal with as you please. Mere wreckage as it is, I believe you might yet—if you would—make something out of it. Will you try?”

Lyon’s voice had almost regained its wonted firmness. But there was that in his eyes, as he put his final question, which no woman could have met unmoved. Dorothy felt herself quivering in every nerve.

“You don’t know— It is not a question of what I will or will not do,” she replied hurriedly, in a half-choked voice. “I cannot be—what you ask me to be to you,”—she seemed afraid to say “your wife,”—“because—I am engaged to be married already.”

Lyon stood a moment as if stunned. Then there came to him a dreary sense of anticipation fulfilled—of having known all along that thus it would be. “To Brian Travers?” he asked very quietly.

Of course he ought not, conventionally speaking, to have put this question at all. The moment, however, was one in which conventionalities had no weight with him; he had temporarily passed into another atmosphere.

"Yes, to my cousin Brian. But—how did you know? And, if you knew, why did you come here to-day?" She paused, her eyes grown suddenly severe, and her mouth almost hard.

"To play Brian this disloyal turn, you mean? Yes—perhaps I had better explain how it came about. Poor creature as I am, Miss Temple, I am not, I hope, quite such a scoundrel as to be capable of laying plans to betray my friend—nor such a dullard as to fancy I should be likely to induce you to break your word to him. No; here I can acquit myself of anything worse than an unfortunate blunder"—

And he proceeded, in few words, to tell her of Mrs. Travers' hints concerning a tie between herself and her cousin, and Jem's subsequent positive contradiction of his mother's assertions.

"After that, I felt myself free to act as I would—without any disloyalty to Brian. I can only say that I am sorry my mistake should have caused you pain. The mistake was rather Jem's than mine, though—at least in the first instance. He assured me so confidently that you were *not* engaged to his brother."

"And he was right," Dorothy struck in eagerly—alarmed perhaps at the growing black-

ness of Lyon's brow, and anxious to exculpate the innocent Jem. "We were not engaged—at that time. There was only a—a sort of understanding—just between ourselves—that there *might* be something, perhaps, when he came home. We had not told any one. Indeed, there was nothing to tell, no promise of any kind." (Dorothy, in her inexperience, felt constrained to explain the matter fully.) "It was while you were here that he first wrote to his mother; and it was only settled a day or two before she died. Till then, there was nothing certain at all—nothing for Jem to know—or any one."

Again, Lyon told himself drearily that he had been right in his presentiments. Mrs. Travers, on her deathbed, had been strong enough to snatch the prize of his life from him. Yet, stay, had he not rather himself wrought the ruin of this last best hope of his manhood? A recollection of his last conversation with Brian Travers—that conversation held in Half-Moon Street two years and a half before—flashed once more across his memory, but this time it was a recollection clear and precise in all its details; he recalled not only the young man's despair in speaking of his rejection by some nameless girl in the country, but his own carelessly-given counsel, and Brian's resolution, taken in accordance with that advice, to try his luck once more.

"It's all my own doing; I have less than no right to complain," he muttered.

"I don't understand." Dorothy's pale face—which had remained without a blush while she told her love-story—wore a look of bewilderment.

"No? Perhaps you can fancy, though, what the feelings of a man might be who should find out that by mistake—half in joke too—he had signed his own death-warrant? That's my position at the present moment. It's certainly a warning not to put one's name heedlessly to any document. I see I am only puzzling you further; but really the riddle's not worth explaining. Good-bye," and he held out his hand. "I'm heartily sorry to have been led into troubling you with my impossible wishes and aspirations. Do me the justice to believe, at least, that if I'd known how matters really stood, I would have spared you the infliction."

"Oh, but I do not—it was not an infliction. You can't guess how grieved I am," she responded incoherently."

"It is kind of you to be sorry for me," he answered gloomily. For a moment the old hateful suspicions mastered him; was the sop to her vanity which his subjection offered so pleasing to her as to swallow up all painful elements in the scene just closing? "Brian is not yet at home?" he asked abruptly, unable to overcome a sudden fierce impulse of curiosity.

"No, he will not be in England before next summer. His three years in Queensland will be up then, and he hopes to get work over here."

Again she spoke without blush or tremor, in a cold, perfectly matter-of-fact tone.

"And then you will be married, of course, and live happy ever after?" with a nervous laugh. "Well,"—giving her a cold, keen look which contrasted singularly with his impassioned one of a few moments before,—"you both have my best wishes towards that desirable consummation."

Almost involuntarily Dorothy faltered, "And you?"

"I?" with an air of surprise. "Oh, I shall turn round—after the manner of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus when disturbed—and try to drop back into the old, comfortable, slumberous condition of the days before I made your acquaintance, as fast as I possibly can. I haven't been awake very long; so, perhaps, if I try hard enough, I may get to sleep again. What?"—in reply to her troubled look, and faint shake of the head;—"you want me to keep awake? That's rather cruel of you. Something like a nurse who should take away the chloroform bottle in order that the patient may feel all the pain of the operation, and thereby learn a salutary lesson of endurance. For I presume that's the end you have in view? You think it would be for my moral benefit to suffer a little more?"

Tears started to the girl's eyes; she clasped her hands and almost wrung them in passionate distress.

"Don't talk so! I don't know what to say—but if you knew how it hurts!"

"Does it? That is curious." Her evident pain cried shame on his suspicions; but bitterness still had the mastery of his spirit. "Since you are so kind-hearted as to be pained by my remarks, I apologise for them, however. You see it never occurred to a selfish egotist like myself that you would be likely to feel much for the ill-luck of a man who is nothing to you—I beg your pardon for misjudging you. Good-bye."

He touched her hand and left her; and this time it was not to look back after he had once turned away. But, had he looked back, he would not have found her, as once before, gazing earnestly after him. His good-bye was scarcely spoken before she had reseated herself in her old place on the wall; and she seemed in no hurry to leave it again. Letting her hands fall into her lap, she sat staring down fixedly into the turbid water of the river making its slow way southwards through the clumps of reeds that had withered to limp, brown, broken stalks since the moonlight night in June when first she had brought him to the Lady's Walk, and told him the sad legend of the place. He must have been far away on the Donnington road before she lifted her white face, and with a quick, sudden movement—the movement of one who is suffocating—put up her hands to her throat, and broke into a strange little laugh.

CHAPTER XI

AT SEA—BY NIGHT

*"This is life's height. . . . This must end here:
It is too perfect."*

THE railway station at Southampton was full of people on their way to one or other of the Channel Islands. It was also full of a peculiarly dense, damp, all-involving fog, which had the effect of greatly aggravating the bustle and confusion incident, even on fair evenings, to the despatch of the Jersey mail-boat. On this particular March night, which was certainly rather foul than fair, the platforms, dimly illumined by dull-burning gaslights, scarcely visible at a few paces' distance, presented a scene of noise and hurry indescribable. Male passengers were scurrying to and fro, in search of baggage or information; anxious women clutched frantically at the elbows of distracted porters; here and there a frightened child, left for a moment to itself, was whimpering pitifully; while a veritable babel of human voices, to which

the harsh, warning tones of the fog-horns and sirens in Southampton Water supplied a monotonous ground-bass, filled the air on every side. Lyon, who had his own private reasons for not wishing to be hustled or otherwise roughly handled just then, looked askance from the booking-office, where he had been taking his ticket for Waterloo, at the vociferous, pushing crowd outside, and hesitated a moment before plunging into the whirlpool.

As he paused, irresolute, on the threshold of his temporary place of refuge, the slim figure of a woman detached itself from the moving mass of eager passers-by, made two or three steps in the direction of the doorway he felt so loath to forsake, stopped, as if to reconnoitre, advanced afresh, and then—presumably catching sight of the overcoat and hat which blocked the way—stopped once more.

“Will you be so kind as to tell me where to find the ticket-office?”

It was a familiar voice which put the question, and all Lyon’s pulses gave a leap as it fell upon his ear,—a leap much too sudden and too violent to be agreeable. For an instant, his breath was not only figuratively, but literally taken away.

For an instant only. It was a scarcely perceptible pause which occurred before he answered, with perfect apparent composure—

“Certainly, Miss Temple. I see you don’t recognise me,” making a step forward, so that the light of the lamp over the doorway should

fall more fully upon him ; " though, indeed, how should you in this darkness ? Did you ever see a better imitation of a London particular ? "

" It is dreadfully foggy," Dorothy replied. (Even now that they were close together, it was impossible for him to see her face at all clearly in such an imperfect light ; besides, the tolerably thick veil she wore would at any time have sufficed to disguise a passing change of expression. But Lyon fancied that he detected a thrill of excitement in her voice.) " How—how very strange that I should meet you here ! "

" Seeing that I have just come over from Jersey, and you, I suppose, have done the same, not so very strange after all, I should say. The only wonder is that we did not encounter one another on board the boat, hours ago. "

" I have not come from Jersey, I am going there. " Dorothy spoke stiffly ; the tone of Lyon's last speech had offended her, and she also felt taken aback at his making no movement whatever to shake hands. " I am going by the steamer which starts at eight o'clock, and I want to find the booking-office. It appears I ought to have taken a through-ticket in London ; unfortunately, I didn't know that. Why, here is the booking-office ! "

" Not the one you want—that's on the other side. I'll go there with you. Are you travelling alone, by the bye ? "

" Quite alone. "

“Perhaps it’s as well we chanced to meet, then. It’s always difficult for a lady to command attention in a crowd.” He stepped out on to the platform. “Keep as close to me as you can. We have some little way to go. Stay a moment! I’ll leave my bag and umbrella behind this door. It’s always best to go unencumbered into a crush.”

He deposited the articles in question—both of which he had been holding till now in his left hand—in the rather dangerous hiding-place he had designated, and, a minute later, they were painfully making their slow way round to the opposite platform, where the “down” booking-office was to be found.

Sustained conversation *en route* was impossible; and speech between the two soon became strictly limited to the issue of brief occasional instructions on Lyon’s part, and a generally monosyllabic signification of assent on the girl’s.

Lyon’s height and great breadth of shoulder stood him in good stead on the present occasion, in the task of clearing a way for himself and his charge. But Dorothy might have noticed—had she been in the mood for close observation—that his movements were singularly awkward, and that he made use of his left hand where it would have been far more fitting—and to all appearance convenient—to have brought his right into play. Thus, for instance, when a momentary block occurred in the moving crowd, and he, fearing she would be separated from him, took

firm hold of her elbow, he put his left arm across to reach her, although she was standing close at his right side.

In the scrimmage that followed the breaking up of the block,—produced chiefly by a big, burly Yorkshireman, who, planted just behind Dorothy, pushed and shoved as vigorously on all sides of him as though he had been a frantic half-back at a North-country football match,—the girl, thrown violently against her companion, caught a smothered exclamation of pain (or impatience, which was it?) which he was not quick enough wholly to suppress.

“I beg your pardon!” she exclaimed in her turn, looking up half-alarmed. “What was it? Have I”—

“It was nothing,” he cut her short brusquely, not giving her time to complete her question.

They reached their destination at length, procured the needful ticket, and then started off afresh in quest of Dorothy’s luggage. This they identified without much difficulty in the weighing room, and took up their station beside it, waiting till their turn at the scales should arrive.

“Luckily, you have plenty of time before you,” Lyon remarked.

“Yes.”

“And this is not such a bad place to wait in. We can at least see each other. Till now, I could hardly have sworn to you, but for your voice.”

Dorothy turned aside rather sharply, and

began busying herself with the lock of her travelling-bag. There was a moment's pause. Then Lyon inquired for Mr. Creighton.

"He has gone to Egypt for three months—on business connected with the book. That is why I am here to-night. My uncle thought at first of leaving me at The Haulms while he was away. But he got a good offer for the house,—from some people he knew,—so he decided to send me to Jersey instead. He has a cousin there—an old maiden lady—who will take me in for the time."

"Not very lively for you. Creighton should have taken you to Egypt with him."

Dorothy shook her head.

"I should have encumbered his movements too much; he is going a good way up the Nile. I daresay I shall like Jersey—very well."

"I trust you may. At any rate, the change will be better for you than staying on alone at The Haulms."

"Do you think so?"—doubtfully. "I would rather have stayed at home, if it had been possible, I think. Could you kindly give me that little hat-box over here? I forgot to strap it before starting, and I know the lock is weak. Oh,"—with a sudden change of tone, as he turned to do her bidding with his left hand, and she perceived for the first time that he carried his right arm in a sling,—“you have hurt yourself!”

"A little. It's not a hurt of any consequence."

The colour came into her face—in dealing with the diminutive lock of the bag, she had found herself obliged to put up her veil—and her eyes grew wonderfully soft.

“Was it up at Creyke—in the riot—that you were hurt?”

“Yes,” he admitted reluctantly. “I hoped”—after a moment’s pause, speaking in a tone which betrayed profound annoyance—“that I had at least succeeded in keeping that foolish little affair out of the London papers.”

“It wasn’t in a London paper that I read the account,” she explained. “It was in a local paper. My uncle’s parlour-maid is a North-country woman,”—this more hurriedly, in answer to his look of surprised inquiry,—“and she lent me the *Leeds Argus*—but the *Argus* didn’t mention your injury!”

“Probably so trifling an injury wasn’t worth mentioning—from the *Argus’s* point of view. If I had been seriously hurt,—if I had had one of my eyes knocked out, for instance,—no doubt they’d have given me a paragraph all to myself. In leaded type, very likely.”

“As the riot took place more than a month ago, and your arm isn’t well yet, it hardly looks as though the injury had been so *very* trifling, after all,” Dorothy retorted. “How did it—happen?”

“Oh, it was the work of the missile usually most in favour on these occasions—the tradi-

tional ‘arf a brick.’” Lyon spoke with less reserve than before. It was sweet—irresistibly sweet—to find that she could be so moved by the thought of his past peril, his present pain.

“You might have been killed!” she ejaculated in a low voice, with a barely-suppressed shudder.

Lyon answered nothing. He was thinking privately that, on the whole, it was perhaps a pity the half-brick had not done its work more thoroughly.

“And I never could understand how the riot arose at all?” Dorothy continued, with a most appealing note of interrogation in her voice.

“It had its origin in a simple difference of opinion. I thought one public-house to every sixty inhabitants an over-large provision; the inhabitants considered it barely sufficient for their wants. Then the publicans to whom I gave notice to quit were naturally displeased—and they had plenty of friends in Creyke. Oh, the outbreak is easily accounted for! Especially in view of my own unpopularity with the miners.”

“Are you sure that you are—unpopular?”

“How should I be anything else? An absentee owner, who habitually leaves everything to a hard-fisted agent, is not likely to be much beloved.”

Dorothy played nervously with the bunch of keys in her hand. “Have things—are things going quietly at Creyke now?”

"I believe so. The pitmen threatened an attack on the workmen who are rebuilding the club-rooms. But, so far, they haven't carried their threat into effect."

"You are rebuilding your club-house, then?" Dorothy's eyes were bright now as well as soft.

"Certainly."

"It was completely wrecked, wasn't it?"

"Completely. Only the foundations remained intact."

"I was afraid"—Dorothy began irresolutely.

"Of what?"

"That you would be so annoyed—and—and disgusted with these people, that you would feel inclined to wash your hands of them altogether. It's very good of you to rebuild the club-house"—

"Not in the least," he interposed. "Goodness has nothing to say in the matter—nor philanthropy either. It's a simple question of obstinacy. I have started on a certain course, and I naturally don't choose to be bullied out of it. No man likes to own himself beaten, if he can help it. Here comes that porter at last!"

The fog had deepened considerably by the time Lyon and Dorothy emerged from the weighing-room; and their short remaining journey—to the jetty where the Jersey boat was lying—had its dangers as well as its difficulties. Lyon kept silence till the quay was reached. There—close to the gangway of the

Cleopatra, which, but for two huge lanterns held aloft on either side of it by two wharfmen in blue jerseys and slouch hats, would have been invisible in the darkness—he ventured a remonstrance.

“This is a sea-fog. You ought not to cross to-night.”

“I must.” Dorothy spoke very decidedly.

He argued the point with her—to no purpose. In vain did he represent how easy it would be to telegraph an explanation to Mr. Creighton’s cousin; in vain did he expatiate on the respectability and quiet of a certain hotel where she might spend the night in perfect comfort and safety. For some reason or other, she was clearly determined to go to Jersey by this particular boat.

(For such a simple and sufficient reason, if only he had known! But, of course, it never occurred to his masculine mind that her seeming unreasonableness might be due to the fact that she had not money about her wherewith to pay for a night’s lodging.)

Reluctantly he assisted her on board, and saw her to the top of the companion. Their argument had occupied some minutes, and now it was fully time for him to get on shore again, so he prepared to take his leave at once.

“I hope you may find it clearer outside,” he said,—a little angrily, for her obstinate refusal to give any heed to his expostulations had annoyed him,—“but I doubt it.”

"I *must* go," Dorothy repeated for the fifth or sixth time. "Indeed, it's really impossible for me to do otherwise. And now, thank you a thousand times for all your kind help, and good-bye."

She shook hands with him quickly, hardly looking at him, and disappeared down the cabin stairs, in the wake of a lady having sole charge of two small children (one in arms), a variety of bags and baskets, and a canary-bird in a cage. Before he turned away, Lyon heard Dorothy inquiring of this much-encumbered matron, "Can I help you at all?" and caught the reply, uttered in tones of unmistakable relief and gratitude—"Oh, if you would kindly give your hand to my little girl!"

He went back to the gangway, and—in the very act of setting his foot upon it—stopped irresolutely. Beyond the figures of the lantern-bearers at the edge of the quay, not an object was visible; everywhere a curtain of blackness, heavy, motionless, impenetrable, met and stopped the eye. The chorus of fog-horns and sirens was growing louder and more continuous.

Lyon hesitated. The wharfmen, ready to withdraw the gangway, called to him impatiently to come ashore.

"No—I've decided to cross."

He had no chance of rescinding this hasty decision. The gangway swung hastily on shore; there came a hoarse shout of "Let go!" and

next moment the *Cleopatra's* screw was beating the water, and Lyon was fairly on his way to the island he had quitted only twelve hours before.

"This is a piece of arrant folly," he said to himself, as he groped his way amidships, stumbling over sundry coils of rope and the stretchers of half a dozen deck-chairs *en route*. "It shows what a once self-respecting man may come to"—with grim amusement. "That was a particularly nice bag I left behind the door, as a legacy for the first enterprising traveller who comes that way. However, the folly is at least harmless—and will never be known to *her*. Of course, she will spend the night in the ladies' cabin. Besides, even if she came on deck, this fog would effectually prevent her seeing me. And if anything *should* happen, I should be at hand—though of what possible use I could be to her, Heaven only knows. Ah, there's the captain! I'll go and ask him what he thinks of the weather."

The captain inclined to the opinion that, once in the Channel, they would get clear of the fog. And his opinion appeared to be correct. As the *Cleopatra* neared the opening of Southampton Water, the mist lifted and grew lighter; before she had been half an hour outside, Lyon could discern the stars over his head. Whereupon he retired to a seat under the bridge, calling himself an egregious fool for his pains, lit a pipe, and smoked furiously for an hour or so. At

the end of that time, the air being still somewhat oppressive, and his pipe having gone out, he fell asleep.

Fell asleep, and dreamed; dreamed himself back in Queensland, in a certain mountain-gorge, through which he had once helped to carry a line of railway. A huge mass of rock barred the advance of his iron road,—which, in his dream, he was making over again,—and he gave orders that it should be blasted with dynamite. Somebody—one of the navvies standing close to him, he supposed—cried out in his ear, “We’ve struck!” and he understood that they had struck the match which was to fire the train. That was wrong—the train should have been lighted by a slow fuse; he tried to say so, to call out, but the explosion was too quick for him, already it shook the ground, it was shattering the rock into a thousand fragments.

He awoke, springing to his feet in the very act of waking. He found himself in darkness—in a darkness which, like that in Egypt of old, “might be felt,”—a darkness made hideous by a confused noise of shrieks and shouts, mingling with an ominous sound of groaning timbers, and a rush as of water entering the steamer’s side. She had struck upon a rock, and was filling fast.

Ten seconds sufficed to inform Lyon of what had occurred. Before half a minute had elapsed, he was feeling his way along the deck in the direction of the companion, guiding himself by

the roof of the saloon-cabin. He had some difficulty in keeping his feet, for the *Cleopatra* had heeled over to the port side when she struck, and to walk her decks now was much like attempting to perambulate the roof of a gabled house; but he managed, with the help of the cabin-roof, to avoid a fall, though several times very near one. Presently he ran full tilt against a man with a lantern in his hand. The light from the lantern illumined the man's features sufficiently for Lyon to see that he was deadly white. It was the second officer.

"What has happened?" Lyon demanded.

He knew perfectly well what had happened as I have said. Still he put his question all the same. People on such occasions seem invariably moved to put unnecessary questions, directing them, preferentially, to persons who have no leisure to answer.

The officer did, however, pause to answer Lyon. "Run on a rock—starboard side half stove in," he replied briefly. "Hold's filling." He tried to pass on.

"Any boats?" inquired Lyon, detaining him by the shoulder.

"Two. The rest are smashed up."

The mate tore himself free, and vanished into the darkness. Lyon groped on his way, guided to a certain extent by the few lights, which, like tiny oases in a waste of gloom, still burned faintly on the funnels and in the rigging,

survivors of a more numerous company that had been for the most part extinguished by the shock of the steamer's encounter with the rock which had pierced her vitals. The lamp suspended over the door leading to the companion was larger, and burned rather more brightly than its fellows. By its light, Lyon, when he reached the spot for which he had been making from the first, was able to distinguish the faces of the crowd of frightened women pouring up from below, half-dressed in many cases, some sobbing and vociferating terrified inquiries, others with the wide-open, fixed eyes, the blanched, silent lips of unutterable fear bearing witness to the horror of dread that had fallen upon them.

Lyon stood aside from the doorway,—it was impossible to get down the staircase,—scanning each face as it passed by with clenched hands and held breath. How long, how long she was in coming! Could she by any chance be so foolish, so utterly mad as to think of staying below? He was fast growing desperate in his terror for her, when he heard her clear voice say, in firm, decided tones, "You must put down that bird-cage."

There was an indistinct reply, the words of which sounded choked by sobs.

"Put it down immediately," Dorothy's voice said, yet more decidedly than before. "You can't carry the child safely, with that thing in your other hand."

Apparently Dorothy's firmness won the day; for when, next moment, the lady of the bird-cage emerged, dishevelled and weeping, from the doorway, she held only her baby in her arms. After her, forced swiftly upward and along by the panic-stricken crowd behind, followed Dorothy, carrying the little girl to whom the mother had begged her to give her hand when she first came on board. She had evidently been lying down in her berth at the moment of the disaster, for she was bareheaded, one thick coil of her disordered hair loose, and hanging down into her neck, and she wore no jacket or cloak over her blue serge gown, only a little woollen shawl, which barely covered her shoulders.

"Give me the child," said Lyon, suddenly stepping forward.

Dorothy evinced not the smallest sign of surprise at his appearance. She merely answered quickly—

"You can't carry her, with that arm."

"Give her to me," Lyon reiterated. "Do as I tell you, at once," speaking with the testy impatience people so often display in moments of strong excitement. "At once, do you hear? We are blocking the way."

She obeyed.

"Now, catch hold of my sleeve, and don't let go for your life! This way—keep hold of the rail with your other hand—be careful you don't slip."

The crowd was moving astern. They moved with it. On every side of them were sobs, cries, loud calls for this and that child or friend missing in the darkness; above them, the captain was shouting hoarse orders from the bridge. The sailors—little lithe Jersey men for the most part—were getting out the two sound boats, with a good deal more of chatter and gesticulation than English seamen would have indulged in under the circumstances. Already one boat was half-lowered. Just above where she swung in mid-air, the crowd halted, a swaying mass; with it, Lyon and Dorothy halted too, perforce.

"Will she sink—the vessel?" asked Dorothy, speaking—save for her half-dozen words of remonstrance when Lyon proposed to take the child from her—for the first time.

"I fear so."

"The first officer gives her ten minutes," put in an elderly man who stood close by, and whose face showed ghastly grey in the light of the lantern, swinging just over his head.

"Shall we?"—Dorothy left her question unfinished.

"There are the boats," Lyon answered her. "We must hope."

Here the child on his arm, hitherto paralysed with fright, began to scream lustily, and the mother turned a distracted, tear-stained face over her shoulder upon Dorothy, as if mutely

beseeking her to comfort the little creature. Dorothy did her best, with soothing words and touches; and the child's screams subsided gradually into an ordinary fit of crying.

"How is it that you are here?" asked Dorothy all at once of her companion, looking up from her occupation of caressing the terrified baby.—"There, there! don't cry any more, little one!—I didn't think at first—it seemed natural—somehow I had a sort of fancy you were on board. But you were going to London?"

Lyon hesitated a moment. Overhead the captain was shouting fresh orders to the crew, a little farther astern a woman had gone into hysterics, and was laughing maniacally. He hesitated—why not tell her the truth? In a few minutes the sea would have closed over him and his follies alike.

"I disliked the idea of your crossing quite alone, in such weather. If I were superstitious, I should say I had a presentiment."

"Man the boats!"

Then followed a wild rush to the side. The elderly man next Dorothy pushed forward with all his strength, and she heard Lyon's voice cry, "For shame! The women and children first!" Other voices echoed the cry, and the reproach. In another minute, there was a general chorus of "The women and children!"—and some of these were being assisted to their places by men who knew well that the escape of their weaker

companions involved their own certain death within a few minutes.

The lady whom Dorothy had befriended was one of the first to obtain a place in the boats. Putting the child she carried already on her left arm, she snatched the other from Lyon's hold with her disengaged hand, and, thus loaded, was lifted bodily over the ship's side. Dorothy looked after her with tears in her eyes. "Oh, I am glad they let her take them both!" she exclaimed.

Lyon had the second mate by the shoulder. "You must find a place for this lady."

"None left in this boat. Room in the other yet," responded the man laconically. "This way, quick! or she'll lose her chance."

"Come!" said Lyon, taking Dorothy's hand.

She, intently watching the perilous descent of the woman and her two children into the boat, had heard nothing of the brief colloquy between her companion and the ship's officer.

"Come? Where?" she asked in bewilderment, as the two men forced a way for her through the crowd.

"To the other boat. They've room there for you."

"And you?" her grasp of his hand tightening suddenly.

"The women and children go first, of course. We men must take our chance"—

"Chance! You heard what that man said. Is there no other boat?"

The mate in front heard the question. "Devil a one!" he flung back savagely over his shoulder.

Dorothy stopped short. "Then I won't go."

"Not go? because— What folly is this?" cried Lyon angrily. "Come, be quick! I tell you there's no time to lose. Your place will be taken"—

"I don't want it."

"You are off your head"—

"Not at all! You are here because of me—I will stay with you."

"This is simple madness!" exclaimed Lyon, nearly beside himself. "But you shall not stay with me! I don't want you—do you hear?—I don't choose to have you. Here, officer! take her—she's out of her mind!" And, before Dorothy could divine, much less resist, his purpose, he had wrenched his hand from her hold, and pushed her, as easily as though she had been a small child, into the grasp of the big seaman. "There, go, like a good child"—

She stretched out her hands to him. "No, no! You have not even said good-bye"—

"Good-bye, then," hastily. He added, with a ghost of his old cynical smile, drawing back out of her reach, "You may take comfort in remembering that drowning is an easy death; and that, on the whole, I'm not sorry"—

Denying himself, for her sake, the last poor

pleasure of a final look at the woman he loved, he turned and deliberately plunged again into the crowd of those left behind.

"Cast off!" he heard the stern order shouted over his head. Then arose a tempest of despairing cries, of piteous entreaties to the departing boats to take "one more—only one more, for the love of God!" but his ear was conscious only of a confused *mêlée* of sound, from which he longed to get away. He groped his way back to his former place under the bridge; here at least it was comparatively quiet. His heavy travelling-cloak, which—the night being so oppressively warm at starting—he had taken off and thrown over the end of the bench where he had finally fallen asleep, still lay where he had left it; he recognised it by its rough texture. It was colder now, with the marrow-chilling cold of the hour that comes just before dawn, and the foggy air was saturated with moisture. Mechanically he picked up the cloak, and threw it over his shoulders. It did not occur to him that since his body would certainly, in a few minutes' time, be tossing to and fro in the waves of the Channel, cold with the rigour of death, he need not be at such special pains to guard it from mere temporary discomfort. His mind was not by any means exclusively fixed on the coming catastrophe. This, indeed, scarcely occupied more than the background of his thoughts, which were mainly busy with the riddle of Dorothy

Temple's strange behaviour. All sorts of possible explanations of her conduct suggested themselves to him in swift succession, but only one seemed adequate to account for it. What if, after all?—Even now, the supposition fired his blood and set his pulses throbbing.

All was now comparatively quiet on board the doomed vessel. The useless cries for help had ceased; men talked together in low voices; and such women as had been left perforce to perish crouched motionless in their places, weeping silently, if at all. The whizz of the rockets which the captain had ordered to be sent up,—in the faint hope that they might attract the attention of some passing vessel,—the intermittent detonation of the distress-signals as they were let off from minute to minute, and the monotonous lap-lap of the water into the hold, were now the only sounds stirring the heavy air. It remained heavy and dark as ever. Pray Heaven it grow lighter soon! Else may she, in that little open boat, easily miss safety after all—

“Is it— Ah, it *is* you!”

Lyon started violently. The faint light of the lantern above his head showed him Dorothy Temple standing in front of him: flushed, trembling, with an expression at once timid and triumphant.

“What!”—he exclaimed, almost stammering in his bewilderment—“what does this mean?”

“Don't be angry with me!” she pleaded.

"There was a girl who wanted my place—to go with her mother. And the mother begged them so hard not to leave the girl behind! I felt it couldn't be wrong—to give up—it was just a question between her and me. And she wanted to go so much, while I wanted—to come back"—

"Because"—Lyon spoke almost harshly—"you had an absurd notion that it was ungenerous to go—without me?"

"No—no. Because I *wished* to be here—for my own sake"—

Terrified, perhaps, at having said so much, she half-turned away from him. But he laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Don't move," he said in a husky voice. "Since you are here, we may as well stay together"—

She stopped, shivering a little, and stood quite still. He let his fingers slide down the arm he held till they met hers—

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"I don't know. Yes, I believe so—a little"—

"Better have my cloak. See here—if you'll just help me off with it—this arm makes me so awkward"—

"No, no, I don't want it! I won't have it!—Ah! what's that?"

The vessel—now becoming every moment more deeply water-logged—had reeled suddenly farther to the port side, with a lurch which nearly threw Dorothy off her feet. Simultaneously with her exclamation of alarm, there

broke out a storm of confused cries from the crowd of passengers in the stern. Lyon flung his arm round his companion.

"Let me hold you; it will be safest so. Then I can shelter you a little, too," he said in the same husky tone, drawing her close to him, and gathering the heavy Inverness about her as best he could with his one available hand.

For an instant she seemed inclined to resist his movement; then all at once she yielded to it completely—and her cheek lay against his breast. His ear caught the sound of a stifled sob; he bent his head over hers.

"My poor child," he murmured brokenly, "I am so sorry! If there were anything I could do, any hope I could honestly give you"—

"You need not be sorry for me!" Her voice, if tremulous, was perfectly clear. "I am quite content—quite willing and happy"—

She had raised her face to speak; and now for a moment he saw it distinctly in the light of the lantern; flushed, quivering, with eyes that shone strangely behind their veil of tears.

"Dorothy!" he cried in passionate bewilderment,—*"Dorothy, is this thing true?"*

"Yes," Dorothy said.

He caught her closer than before to his breast, pressing her to him with the whole strength of his strong arm; and for a moment both were as completely forgetful of their surroundings, of the terrible circumstances that had given

them to each other's embrace, of the death actually yawning under their feet while they clung together, as though these things were not, and the deck of the sinking steamer had been suddenly transformed into some sheltered garden of Arcadia.

But the moment was necessarily brief. The woman was the first to awake from that oblivious ecstasy into recollection of the grim actualities of the situation.

"I suppose—there is no wrong done, now?" she faltered.

"Wrong?" Lyon repeated dreamily, kissing her eyelids in a sort of passion of tenderness. He was still so much in the seventh heaven that her question held no meaning for him. "What wrong should there be?"

"I meant wrong towards *him*—Brian."

"Oh!"—indifferently. He had quite forgotten that such a person as Brian Travers existed. And, even now that he was reminded of the fact, it seemed to him a fact wholly unimportant, and totally without bearing on the present crisis.

"It is all as if I were dying—you said there was no hope. This is not to break my promise, is it?" she persisted.

Lyon had tangled his hand in her loosened hair, and was thinking how fine and silky and thick it felt. With an effort he roused himself to answer—

"No, child, no. Promises such as yours don't extend to the next world, thank Heaven! Why did you ever give that promise, Dorothy?"

"I did not dream you cared—and his mother begged me so when she was dying. You know *he* had wished it so long! And she said I should be responsible for his ruin if I cast him off."

"Then, if I hadn't hesitated and dallied—My God, this is bitter! To see, too late, what might have been."

"Surely it doesn't matter much now!" She nestled softly against him, putting up her arms to clasp his neck.

"Not matter? A few short minutes set against a whole lifetime!"

Lyon's voice shook with a passion of longing, regret, rebellion. He felt himself thrilling with a frantic desire to live—he, who had so often pronounced life not worth living. He was fiercely athirst for the cup about to be dashed from his lips before he had well tasted its sweetness; hungry beyond words for the feast that, Barmecide-like, fate was showing him in mockery, only to sweep it beyond his reach for ever.

Dorothy, recognising in his cry of bereavement the utterance of an anguish which it was beyond her power to measure, was silent a moment. Then—

"There will be all—the other life—for us," she suggested gently.

Lyon had his doubts on this point. "The other life" seemed to him a sadly shadowy and unsubstantial substitute for this flesh-and-blood existence he must presently forego. It had never been much more to him than a cold, unreal abstraction—a graceful, glacial hypothesis constructed to fill up the darkness and void of the Beyond. Words he had once heard quoted beat in his brain—

"This warm, sweet world is all I know."

Yes, it was warm—warm and sweet; he confessed it at last. It was having its revenge upon him who had so long maligned it as cold and bitter.

He had his doubts. But he would not throw the shadow of them across the sunlight of her unhesitating faith. So he only murmured, "Yes," vaguely, and kissed her again.

"So, you're content?" he asked a moment later.

"Yes."

He reflected that her love must be cold compared with his own—else she could not be satisfied with the prospect of a merely shadowy future, in which they might be together or apart—who could tell?

"And, do you know?" Dorothy was saying in his ear, "I hardly think I could bear a whole lifetime of happiness like this. It would be too much, Indeed, I can hardly bear it for these few minutes."

"Oh, hush, hush!" he interrupted, crushing

her against his heart—the creature who had deliberately returned to die at his side, and whose pure love he had dared for a moment to belittle in his thoughts, because it could live and breathe in the spiritual air which was too rarefied for his selfish, earthly passion. “Why did you ever love me, child? I have cost you your life, and God knows I’m not worth the sacrifice.”

“What was that?” asked Dorothy, starting.

“Nothing, nothing. Another signal gone off.”

“No, it was something giving way below—under where we’re standing. Is the steamer—going to pieces, do you think?”

“I don’t know—perhaps. Don’t be frightened, dear! I shall not let you go. And the pain—what there is of it; it won’t be much—will be all over in a minute or two.” Lyon spoke with the confidence of a person who had undergone the process of drowning several times already. He was conscious of so speaking, and even felt faintly amused at himself.

“I don’t think I am very frightened,” Dorothy responded. “It’s strange, but I am not. Only—don’t do that, please,” suddenly hiding her face on his shoulder. “I can’t think of anything—when you kiss me.”

“I don’t want you to think of anything,” pressing her cheek to his.

“But I must—we ought! In two or three minutes, perhaps, we shall be—before God.”

"Well, do you suppose He wishes you to come before Him in an agony of terror? Doesn't it look rather as if my being here—when there were a thousand chances to one against it—were Heaven's way of making this *less* terrible for you, poor little thing?"

A sob shook her. "Oh, I know God has been very good to us!" she cried, with tears.

He was silent, stroking her bowed head gently. All was quiet around them; a sudden ominous hush seemed to have settled down upon the *Cleopatra* and her hapless freight. The cold breath of the morning was in the air, and the fog was gradually thinning, fading from black to grey; though the lantern overhead had flickered out, Lyon could just discern the brightness of Dorothy's hair against the rough, dark surface of his coat. For some moments she did not move; he guessed that she was praying, and would not disturb her. At length she lifted her face of her own accord.

"They have stopped signalling."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Either the supply's exhausted, or"—reluctantly—"they're out of heart, and think it's useless to make any further effort."

"Then the end's near?"

"I suppose so. Oh, my child, my child! why did you come back?"

Her eyes were brighter than ever. "I am

so glad I came! Don't—don't be sorry for me; indeed, there's no reason. I was so unhappy; and my life would only have been harder to bear as time went on. Sometimes I could scarcely face the thought of it."

A loud, harsh call—differing wholly from any sound that had preceded it—rang out through the fast-thinning fog. It was answered by an unintelligible shout from the man still keeping a forlorn look-out forward, taken up in stentorian tones by the captain on the bridge, repeated and echoed with infinite variations by a hundred voices hoarse with emotion.

"What is it?" asked Dorothy, with quivering lips and dilated eyes.

For answer Lyon loosed his arm from her, pointing to where, on the *Cleopatra's* port bow, two huge red lights shone stationary in the mist.

"What is it?" he repeated. "Why, it's a steamer!—a steamer come to our rescue! Those are her lights; she is lying-to to help us. We are saved, Dorothy!—saved to live for each other, and love each other. Do you understand, my darling?" catching her to him anew and pressing passionate kisses on her forehead and lips. "Do you understand?"

If Dorothy understood, she gave no sign of rejoicing in her knowledge. She kept silence, trembling in his arms—as she had not trembled before.

CHAPTER XII

ON SHORE IN THE MORNING

"Here stand I; I can no other; God help me!"

IT was a boat bound for St. Malo, and strayed from her course in the fog, which now came so opportunely to the rescue of the helpless human beings on board the *Cleopatra*.

She had not arrived a moment too soon. The last boat-load of the shipwrecked had barely reached her side, when the vessel they had just quitted reeled over like a drunken man, and went down almost masts-foremost into the dark, mist-enshrouded waters that had been gaining on her with such fatal rapidity during the past few minutes. By the time the last occupant of the boat had climbed on board the *Marie-Thérèse*, the faint light of dawn, breaking through the dispersing vapours upon a sea smooth as oil, showed the place of the unlucky *Cleopatra's* burial, unmarked by so much as a ripple.

The *Cleopatra*, it appeared now, had been but

a few miles distant from Guernsey when she met her fate; the captain of the St. Malo steamer, therefore, announced his intention of landing the rescued passengers and crew at St. Peter-Port before proceeding on his way to the Breton coast. Doubtless, the fact that his own vessel—a much smaller one than that which had just gone down—was uncomfortably, and even dangerously, overcrowded by the unexpected addition to its freight, played a large part in the captain's considerations, when he decided to take a course so welcome to his temporary guests.

"We shall be in so soon, it will be hardly worth while for you to go below," Lyon said to Dorothy. He seemed afraid to let her out of his sight; even now he was holding one of her hands tight, under shelter of the fur cloak a compassionate lady-passenger of the *Marie-Thérèse* had insisted on lending her. "I'll beg, borrow, or steal a rug for you, and you will be quite comfortable in this sheltered corner of the deck. Besides, it is getting warmer every moment"—

"But how about the child?" said Dorothy doubtfully, looking down at a small girl of seven or eight years old, who was clinging timidly to her other hand.

Travelling alone, under the care of the stewardess,—sent by an aunt in England to join her parents in Jersey, she said,—this child had

been placed, next Dorothy, in the boat that conveyed her and Lyon from the sinking *Cleopatra* to their present asylum; with the result that Dorothy had, as a matter of course, assumed charge of the forlorn, frightened little creature.

"How about the child?" she asked now. "You can see she is quite worn out."

With difficulty Lyon choked back the impatient exclamation—disallowing altogether the child's claim on Dorothy's attention—which rose to his lips. "Can't she go back to the stewardess?" he asked discontentedly. "She's supposed to look after her, isn't she?"

"The stewardess is in no state to look after anybody, poor woman! She is quite hysterical with fright."

"Well, if you are set on keeping her with you, we might make her up a bed on this seat."

Dorothy accepted the suggestion—a little reluctantly, it seemed to Lyon. He was conscious that she would have preferred the shelter of the cabin; and this consciousness disquieted him. In her timid effort to escape from him temporarily, he discerned the first symptom of an endeavour to escape him altogether. He clenched his hands, silently vowing that neither the one attempt nor the other should succeed.

Meanwhile—having gained the victory in this preliminary skirmish—he judged it wisest to adopt a tactic of prudent reserve, keeping back

all his forces for the more serious trial of strength he foresaw looming in the near distance. During the half-hour that elapsed before the *Marie-Thérèse* dropped anchor at St. Peter-Port, he scarcely proffered so much as a remark; he merely stood beside Dorothy (as she sat at the end of the bench on which her little *protégée* lay sleeping soundly), overshadowing her, as it were, with his silent presence. And yet he would have given a year of his life to know what course her thoughts were taking.

Her face, often as he glanced at it, closely as as he studied it every now and then, told him nothing. Her features kept the set, expressionless look that great exhaustion—whether mental or physical—so frequently produces; her eyes remained, for the most part, persistently cast down. He could not even feel sure that she was aware of his recurrent scrutiny.

Once, however, she looked up and said abruptly, "Couldn't you find a seat somewhere? This bench is so short, it's impossible to make room— But elsewhere, perhaps"—

"Thanks," he replied laconically. "I prefer staying here."

"You will be so tired!"

"I am much too happy to think of being tired,"—with a slight, grave smile.

He made not the slightest movement towards her in speaking. Nevertheless, as he spoke, she drew farther away from him, with a shiver;

and, herself, spoke no more till they were alongside the pier, and speech became a matter of practical necessity.

In pursuance of the plan he had almost instinctively formed for maintaining his hold over her will, he scarcely made a pretence of consulting her as to what she chose to do on landing; rather, he took the command as a matter of course, issuing his orders with an air of expecting them to be implicitly obeyed. No boat would leave for Jersey till the following morning; it was, therefore, necessary for her to have rooms, meantime, at an hotel. He knew the hotel she ought to go to; he would take her there at once.

"I must keep *her* with me," Dorothy interrupted, pointing to the child.

That was as she pleased, of course. The child's parents must be telegraphed to, and Miss Dumaresq? Very good. Lyon would send the telegrams, and bring her the answers—there would be answers, no doubt—when she had rested. For she must put herself, as well as the child, to bed, and get a thorough good sleep before noon.

"Promise me you will do that," he entreated. They were standing, by this time, in the hotel corridor, she with her hand already on the lock of the half-open door leading into the little sitting-room he had engaged, on the plea that she could not possibly take her meals down-

stairs in the coffee-room ; the child, her fright forgotten, had already run inside, and was eagerly exploring her new and strange quarters. "Promise me, please! Remember, I cannot have you falling ill, on any pretext."

"I promise to go to bed at once," she answered in a flat, toneless voice.

"And you'll try to sleep?"

"Yes. You'll bring the telegrams when they come?"

"At twelve. I don't think you ought to get up sooner. I beg you'll observe that I am acting in a most self-denying fashion," he added, laughing nervously—but watching the effect of his words keenly, all the same.

She seemed to wince under his look—she turned her face slightly aside. "If there should be no answers, you'll still come, at twelve? Because—I—have something to say"—

"So have I—hundreds of things!" he returned, with resolute, but not very genuine, cheerfulness. "To begin with— No, I won't begin! If I did, I should probably keep you talking till noon—or midnight—in this exceedingly cold passage. Good-bye, then, till noon ; sleep well, my darling."

No one was in sight ; these two had the whole long, ill - lighted corridor to themselves. He made a movement as if to take her in his arms, but she eluded without seeming to see it, and slipped away from him over the threshold of

the doorway. "At twelve, then," she said—and softly shut to the door.

He stood contemplating its grimy oak-grained panels for a full minute, with a curious, baffled expression of countenance. Then he mechanically put on his hat, and went downstairs. Going across the hall, he found himself shivering violently; all the blood in his veins seemed to have suddenly grown cold. Certainly that passage was very draughty. Or perhaps he had got chilled, sleeping on deck in the fog during the early part of the night. He must try to shake the sensation off by taking a walk. So he made his way briskly to the nearest post-office, and despatched his two telegrams to the addresses with which Dorothy had furnished him; then wandered down one of the steep streets of St. Peter-Port to the sea.

The sun was now in full splendour, and had long since drunk up all lingering remnants of last night's dangerous mists. The sky in which it shone was blue and clear as a Provence sky in spring, and the blue-green expanse of the Channel looked, in its waveless smoothness, like a gigantic pond. Behind Lyon, as he stood gazing out seawards, the sunlight played deliciously upon the quaint red and brown roofs of the old town which seems to cling so desperately to the bare face of the cliff, up which it has gradually climbed to the fertile table-land above; before him, it made beautiful the brown

sails of a little fleet of returning fishing-boats and the white wings of a yacht or two lying just outside the harbour, and glittered bravely on the sides of dainty little Herm and Jetta rising sparkling from the calm sea. At this hour all was quiet on the quays; only a few fishermen were laying out a pile of dripping nets to dry on the strip of shingly beach below. Lyon sat down on an overturned boat, at some little distance from this busy group, and set himself to review his position seriously—to perfect and elaborate the plan of action he had already inaugurated.

He remained there a long time; and when he got up to walk back to the hotel, his face wore a look which said, plainly enough, that he did not intend to be beaten in the coming encounter.

Precisely at twelve o'clock he knocked at Dorothy's sitting-room door, and Dorothy herself admitted him. She looked worn and tired—far more so than when they parted, six hours earlier. It was clear that she had not slept.

"I'm afraid you have not kept your promise," said Lyon, taking her hand and holding it firmly.

She made no attempt to withdraw it. But there was a certain effect of shrinking in her manner as she responded quickly—

"Oh yes, I did! I've been resting for hours."

"H'm!" doubtfully. "You don't look as if you had had much sleep."

"No; I couldn't manage that. It's—it's so difficult to sleep in the middle of the day. Have you had any replies to your telegrams?"

"To one of them. Mr. Maynard wires that he will be here by this afternoon's boat, to take his child off your hands. But there's nothing from Miss What's-her-name — Miss Dumaresq."

"Perhaps she didn't think it necessary to telegraph, as you said I should come on to-morrow. You must remember she doesn't know me yet."

"All the same, she might have expended sixpence in expressing a decent satisfaction that you had not found a watery grave on your way to visit her. I am not prepossessed in favour of this elderly maiden lady of yours, Dorothy. If I don't like her looks to-morrow, I shall just bring you away again at once; so hold yourself warned!" said Lyon, with deliberate audacity, and a clumsy attempt at playfulness. Nothing (he said to himself) like carrying things with a high hand from the outset. The sooner matters came to a point between him and Dorothy the better; this speech would probably bring them to a point.

It did. To a point which he—with all his prevision of some sort of resistance on her part—had hardly anticipated.

Said Dorothy, resolutely freeing her imprisoned fingers from his hold—

"Forgive me, but—that is foolish talking, Mr.

Lyon. You must know quite well that you can't go on with me to Jersey."

"Why not? Because you are not provided with a duenna? Do you think Miss Dumaresq would be shocked at my escorting you?"

"Don't pretend to misunderstand—and, oh, please,"—with a sudden pathetic break in her voice,—“don't try to—to joke about it! You must see, as well as I, that—what happened last night goes for nothing now."

"Pardon me, I see nothing of the kind."

"Things are just as they were before we happened to meet at the station."

"Not at all; excuse my contradicting you so bluntly, but it's important you shouldn't involve yourself in a mental fog, which you are evidently striving to do. Things are on a perfectly different footing between us now, to what they were twenty-four hours since. I know that you love me, remember. You have acknowledged in so many words"—

"When I believed that I—that both of us—were going to die within the next five minutes!" she interrupted eagerly.

"Which makes the acknowledgment doubly valuable. I am all the more sure of your sincerity. You can't undo last night's work, Dorothy."

"Not wholly. But"—

"But you are troubled about poor Travers? My darling child, do you suppose I didn't know the first glimpse of the *Marie-Thérèse's* lights

was a signal for you to begin fretting your heart out over that poor fellow? I am sorry for him, too—heartily sorry; but he has partly himself to blame for his disappointment. You never cared for him, and he knew it. He should have had the manliness to take ‘No’ for an answer, and leave you in peace. Instead of this, he first tries to catch you in the snare of an indefinite promise; then sets his mother on to play upon your feelings, and worry you into a definite one at a time when you were not fit to take any serious decision”—

Lyon, in his eagerness, was actually talking fast. Dorothy put up her hand, as if to stay this unusual flow of words on his part.

“Still, that makes no difference,” she said. “I have given my word to him—and to her; I must keep it.”

There was a quiet decision in her manner which struck coldly across the fever of Lyon’s excitement. But he gave no outward sign of alarm. His answer was none the less prompt and imperious. “I will not allow you to keep it. You have given me a right”—

“No, no! I have given you no right—no right over me at all.”

Lyon felt the chill of fear increasing upon him. Dorothy was revealing herself in an entirely new light. In making up his mind to silence peremptorily all attempt at opposition to his will on her part, he had never taken into

consideration the possibility of her refusing to be silenced. He had thought of her as an inexperienced girl, impulsive, malleable, probably with little will of her own—though the events of last night, at least, might have taught him better; he had not reckoned on having to deal with a determined woman, resolutely bent on satisfying her conscience at all costs.

"No right?" he repeated indignantly. "I no right over you? Who should have any but I? If it's true that you love me as you gave me to understand last night you did—*Is* it true, by the way?"

"Yes, it is true," she answered, flushing suddenly.

"Then to talk of marrying another man is folly; and, worse still—falsehood," retorted Lyon trenchantly. "Falsehood, both to me and to him."

Dorothy pressed her hands tight together. "It was just the same—last November—when you came to Heyford," she said in a low voice.

"How—just the same? What do you mean?"

"I mean that I—cared for you just as much"—her colour deepening again. "But you did not ask me, *then*, to break faith! you took it for granted that—my engagement put an end to everything."

"Because I had no idea how matters really stood at that time. There is no use trying to fence with me, Dorothy; I tell you frankly, you have no right to marry Brian Travers, and I won't let you do it."

"I must keep my promise," setting her lips together tightly.

"You talk like a romantic child. You *are* a romantic child, or you would never have consented so lightly to give yourself into lifelong bondage to a man you don't love, on the off-chance that your self-sacrifice might possibly work his reformation. That is the sort of thing a young girl imagines noble and heroic, because she reads of it in novels; frantic self-immolation seems to be the favourite virtue of that strange creature, the modern novelist," flung out Lyon. "Hush! If you say you gave your word to please Mrs. Travers, then *I* say the motive was still more inadequate to the action! But let that pass. You have made a great mistake; I'll help you to retrieve it. I'll save you from the life of misery and degradation you seem so eager to enter upon. Promise!"—lashing out angrily again;—"What's a rash, ill-considered promise compared with the happiness of two lives?"

"Happiness is not everything," said Dorothy mournfully.

"Then, for the sake of a few words spoken at random, I am to lose the only hope the world holds for me, and you are to be sold body and soul, into the worst kind of slavery a woman can know? You acknowledged that you had been miserable this last six months; do you think you will be less miserable in the years to come, as Brian Travers' wife? You don't know what

you are doing, child. Look at it coolly. A year won't see the end of your sacrifice—nor ten years—nor twenty; it will last as long as your life, or his. You will have to make it afresh every day—and every hour of every day; and you will torment yourself all the time because you don't, and can't, make it perfectly, because, for all your efforts, you cannot help sometimes remembering and regretting, and rebelling secretly against your chains. Be brave before it's too late! Don't think of what the world will say—or your friends—have the courage to be true to yourself! If only women had courage to be true to themselves, there would be fewer wretched marriages than one hears of nowadays, and fewer ruined lives."

"But," she said, with an earnestness that was almost childlike, "I am trying to be true."

"Do you call it being true to take one man for your husband, when you are all the while in love with another?" Lyon demanded bluntly.

"Would it be true to break one's word—to the living and the dead alike? Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid!"

"Yes, I know well enough that you are afraid," he responded tauntingly. "But what are you afraid of? Of Mrs. Travers' angry ghost?"

"No!" Her eyes flashed sudden anger upon him—and poignant reproach.

"Of what, then?"

"Of seeing Brian's life spoiled—utterly spoiled

—as his mother feared, because of my failure to keep faith with him.”

“Why should you hold yourself responsible for the spoiling of Brian’s life?”

“I have made myself responsible—in a way.”

“Then—to speak plainly—you had no business to assume any such responsibility—making yourself a kind of special providence”—

“Maybe not.” She sighed wearily, as if getting tired of the prolonged contest. “It’s often very hard to know whether one is doing right or wrong.”

“You confess you feel bewildered? Let me judge for you, then. I’ll take the sin—if there be any—of your breaking off with Travers upon my shoulders, readily enough.” He held out his hand to her.

But she drew back proudly. “No. I cannot let you judge for me. I must judge for myself.”

“And yet,” she added, after a moment,—his consciousness of having made a false step keeping him silent,—“I think I could be content to let you judge for me too. Suppose that I were in your place, and you in mine. Suppose that you were not free”—

“Well?” uneasily.

“Suppose that you had been engaged to another girl before you ever saw me. Would you have thought yourself at liberty to break faith with her, because you liked me best?”

Lyon seemed stricken dumb for an instant.

He cast about wildly for an answer that should not afford her any weapon of defence. But, with her sad, inquiring eyes fixed full upon his face, he dared not lie to her.

"That's a different matter altogether," he said at length evasively. "The cases are not on all fours." Not very ingenious evasion this. But it was the best he could do on the spur of that difficult moment.

"Would you feel at liberty to break faith with that girl?" Dorothy persisted.

"Well—no, I suppose not. No—of course a man is bound to—to"—

"To keep his word at all costs, you mean? Yes, I know he is. And why not a woman? Why may I do that with a light heart which you would be the first to pronounce dishonourable in yourself, or any other man? A thing for which—you know it very well—a man is despised and condemned, and even *cut* by all the men of his acquaintance who have any sense of honour. Do you suppose we women have no sense of honour?—that I, in particular, have none? Oh, how meanly you must think of me!" cried Dorothy passionately.

"Meanly?" he cried in his turn. "Why, I worship you! I could kiss the hem of your gown for reverence."

"And yet you urge me to do this shameful thing, knowing all the while that, if I were weak enough to let you persuade me, I should never

again be the same in your eyes. Oh, you can't deny it!"—in return to his vehement gesture of dissent; "I see in your face that you feel how it would be!"

Lyon could have cursed that ingrained habit of truthfulness which made it impossible for him to utter a good round lie at this crucial moment.

"You confuse things," he responded, still lamely evading a direct answer. "A woman's obligations, under such circumstances, are not so serious as a man's."

"Perhaps not, according to conventional rules. But you did not talk just now of conventional rules; you told me to be *true*."

Ignoring this interposition—"Try to look at things from a common-sense point of view," he urged. "If a man throws a girl over,—jilts her, to use an ugly word,—he injures her by so doing. It's not a mere question of hurting her feelings. He injures her prospects in life—sometimes her standing in society as well. A woman who breaks with a man does him no material injury whatever."

"She doesn't spoil his chances of marrying in the future, if that's what you mean," retorted Dorothy, with a touch of scorn. "Breaking his heart, and perhaps driving him to destruction, are not material injuries, of course, so I suppose they don't count"—

"Oh yes, they count," Lyon returned, with at least equal bitterness of tone. "When Brian

Travers is in question, that's to say. Has it never occurred to you" —half threateningly—"that your admirable fidelity to *him* might be the means of sending *me* a little more completely to the dogs? Since you are so anxious for Brian's moral welfare, it seems rather strange you should remain indifferent to mine."

"Ah, I am not so afraid—for you!"

"I thank you" —sarcastically — "for your flattering opinion, but I fear it's not very well founded. Dorothy," — his harsh tones melting suddenly into appealing softness,— "I *cannot* do without you—you know it! Put Brian out of your thoughts for a moment"—

"I can't! I dare not! He has no one left now but me; his mother was the only other person he cared for and clung to."

"And whom have I?" said Lyon quietly.

A look of intense distress crossed her face. "Oh, I know! It breaks my heart! But think how he has waited—waited and worked for three years. Would you have me tell him when he comes home that all his work and waiting is to go for nothing, because I—I—I can't. I will not! Surely *you* should be the last to ask this of me, you who know what it is to—to"—

"To have a woman play me false." He completed the sentence. "Yes; perhaps you did well to remind me of that too. I am certainly unlucky,"—with a contortion of the mouth in-

tended to pass for a smile. "One is fickle, and another over-constant; one has no principle at all, and the other is principle itself incarnate. In either case, *I* go to the wall."

She said nothing in answer to this outbreak. A little ashamed of it, perhaps, he took a turn across the little room and came back again.

"However, that's neither here nor there," he said in a quieter tone. "Let us leave my interests out of the question altogether, and consider yours. I tell you once more, you are bent on committing an act of folly. Noble folly, I acknowledge—but folly, downright madness, for all that. You are taking up a burden that's too heavy for you. You are making a sacrifice of which you haven't even begun to count the cost. A sacrifice which—mark my words!—will never achieve its aim. I know Brian Travers better than you do. I know him as one man knows another; as no woman—no *good* woman, even if she be his wife—ever knows any man. And from what I know of him, I foresee the failure, the utter uselessness of this self-immolation of yours on the altar of his selfish weakness. If he is too weak to stand alone, do you think *you* will be able to hold him up?"

"At least I shall have done my best."

"He does not deserve"—

"Hush! All the more reason, then, why I should try to help him."

"Shall I tell you," said Lyon, after a moment's

pause, "what you are doing? You are immobilizing yourself, not to Brian at all, but to your own craze after usefulness."

She grew a shade paler. "I—I don't think so," she murmured. But her eyes had a frightened look. "And, anyhow, it's my duty to think of Brian first."

"And *I* am—nothing?"

"No!" quickly moved by a sudden passionate impulse to the utterance of the whole truth. "You are everything—in one sense. You must be content with that."

He stood a moment, not speaking—conscious that she had uttered her last word. The very frankness of her confession witnessed to the unbroken strength of her resolution. Further argument would be worse than useless.

"I suppose I ought to feel grateful to you for saying so much," he observed, after a while. "But I'm not. You only aggravate the hurt you've done me by attempting to heal it with such transcendental balms. I'm not spiritually-minded enough to appreciate them. The love that shows itself by denying itself—by obstinately refusing a man everything he asks of it—may be a very lofty kind of love perhaps. It's certainly beyond my comprehension. Well, so I am not even to have the pleasure of escorting you to Jersey?"

"You must see yourself that—it's better not," the girl answered in a broken voice.

"Oh, I see nothing. The whole matter is very dark to me, and highly confusing. But, of course, I bow to your judgment in the matter. I had better go back to England by the six o'clock boat, I suppose—the one that is to bring Mr. Maynard. I forgot—you will have an escort after all in him."

Dorothy seemed to have become all at once incapable of speech. She stood before Lyon in perfect silence, her fingers plucking nervously at one another.

"So there's no more to be said—except good-bye," he resumed. Then he half put out his hand. "Strange to think that it's not yet twelve hours since that night. Such a night! to go for nothing, after all."

"It doesn't go for nothing. It remains always." She spoke scarcely above a whisper.

His upper lip took the unlovely curve—half smile, half sneer—that had ceased to be habitual to it of late. "Hardly fair to Travers, that—is it?" he asked, almost insolently; "since your main object is to be true to him."

Her eyes were ablaze with indignation. "I mean to be true to him—and with him," she retorted proudly. "I shall tell him"—

"Everything?"—in the same exasperating tone.

"I shall tell him again"—commanding herself with difficulty—"what I told him before he went away, that I don't love him, that I am only fond of him—as a cousin. And I shall

tell him, besides, that I know now I can never feel differently—as he hoped I should do, some time or other. If he still wishes to marry me on those terms”—

“Listen!” Lyon interrupted, his manner wholly changed. “If you say so much, he may guess more. He may ask you”—

“No. He won’t ask me anything.”

“Then he must be”—Lyon pulled himself up sharply. “Any man who really cared for a woman would be eager to discover her reason for feeling certain that she must always remain indifferent to him. And no man—worthy the name—would wish to persist in marrying a woman when he knew she cared for somebody else. See here, Dorothy, you have not shown yourself very ready hitherto to listen to any appeal of mine, but don’t shut your ears to this one. If Travers asks you anything, promise me to be honest with him, for God’s sake.”

She paused a moment before replying. His eyes pleaded for him more eloquently than his tongue had done—those mournful, tender blue eyes which contrasted so oddly with the rest of the dark, harsh face confronting her. She drew a long breath.

“If he asks me, I will tell him—all the truth.”

“And—one thing more. Promise to tell *me*, too, all the truth. As soon as he comes back, write to me—yes, that much I may fairly ask for. One letter—but let it be a *true* one. Don’t

think, before you begin to write, of what it would be most fit and proper to say under the circumstances; write me the truth. Whether you write to tell me to come back to you, or to say that you're going to be married next week to Travers, let me have the truth, without fear or favour!"

"I will write, since you wish it," she said, half turning away from him. "But there will be nothing to say. Oh, why don't you go?" she exclaimed suddenly, turning round again with an impatient movement. "What is the use of our talking any more?"

His whole face gave a kind of convulsive twitch. "I beg your pardon," he said quickly. "I'll go at once."

"Oh, not like that!" Dorothy cried after him, holding out her hand—for he was moving to the door, without any attempt at farewell. "Not as—as if you were angry."

"Angry? My darling!" he said.

Perhaps it was his partial helplessness that appealed to her beyond her strength of resistance. She liked to think so afterwards; to imagine that, if he had had both arms free to stretch out towards her, she might have found it in her heart to refuse his embrace.

"You must stay with me, Dorothy—I can't give you up," he whispered, his lips touching her hair.

She made no answer. Wearied out, she may have felt tempted, for a moment, to yield to his importunity.

"Have a little courage!" he urged her. "I know I'm not asking you to do what will cost you nothing—but if you love me!—Oh, it's worth your while to make this sacrifice, Dorothy! Don't reason or argue any more about the matter; it isn't a matter for reason and argument at all. You must let your heart decide. What's Brian Travers' claim beside mine? You could never be his wife in reality; you belong to me, and you will continue to belong to me, though the law and the Church together were to make you his ten times over."

"I can't think," she faltered pitifully, "why you should care for me so! I am not really fitted to be your wife. I know so little—I am so different altogether."

"Yes," he interrupted, "you are different—totally different, thank Heaven! You are everything that I am not; you have everything that I have lost. And therefore—therefore I love you with all the strength of my soul—and I am going to keep you mine, in spite of yourself."

"No." She lifted her white face resolutely; the weakness that had momentarily disabled her from resistance was already past. "No—I can't break faith—not even for you. Let me go now, please."

He loosed his hold of her at once. "It's quite true," he observed, fixing her with a hard, keen glance—"women *don't* know how to love. The world is always more to them than any one man in

it. Well, since it is your highest ambition to be known as a woman of your word, by all means go and carry it out! No doubt the unwavering esteem of East Hillshire will amply compensate you for any little sacrifice you may have made in order to retain it."

He stopped suddenly short, smitten with compunction. Swaying backward against the end of the mantelpiece, she faced him, white and dumb, her wide-open eyes full of a piteous appeal to his mercy; shivering under his bitter words as though they had been so many blows.

"Heavens! what brutes we men are!" he exclaimed, almost under his breath. "After last night—to taunt *you* with want of love! How could any man be guilty of such baseness? You may think yourself well rid of such a selfish coward."

"Hush!" she interrupted. "I know you did not mean it—really; I sha'n't think of it again"— She stopped short in her turn, seemingly because she had no voice to go on speaking. At the same time she put up one hand surreptitiously to the mantelpiece to steady herself.

Lyon saw the movement. "You are trembling," he observed abruptly. "You are worn out—and no wonder!" He moved forward an arm-chair that stood near. "Sit down here," he said. "You are cold, too"—just touching her hand as she mechanically obeyed his order. "And this fire has quite gone down. Let me see if I can mend it a little—before I go."

He knelt on the hearthrug, coaxing the dying embers till they blazed again, and Dorothy lay back in the big chair watching him silently. When he got up from his knees, and faced her, she did not turn her eyes away.

"You look better now," he observed briefly.

"I am better—thanks." She looked up at him gratefully.

"I don't ask your forgiveness for my inexcusable brutality just now," he went on, drawing a long breath. "You must take it that I was mad for the moment."

"I do." Her lips trembled ; she made a great effort to control them. "And you—you must try to believe that I—cannot help myself."

"No," he responded quickly. "Being what you are, I don't suppose you *can* help yourself. Only"—with strong emphasis—"I wish to God I could be sure you are not making a mistake! Good-bye."

A strange darkness, such as gathers before the eyes of men in moments of unendurable physical agony, gathered before Lyon's eyes as he uttered those last words. He held Dorothy's hand for an instant—seeing her face, meanwhile, blurred and blotted as by an intervening mist ; it was by a sort of instinct only that he found the door, and, somehow or other, got himself downstairs and out into the steep street, where the sun was still shining merrily, and a pleasant air blowing in from the sea.

CHAPTER XIII

THREE MONTHS LATER

*"Time has done with his one sweet word,
The wine and leaven of lovely life."*

IT was as yet early in July ; but the night was heavy with a sultry heat suggestive rather of mid-August. Although eleven had struck some time since, and—despite the lateness of the hour—the three windows in the library of the rambling old Manor House at Creyke remained wide open, Lyon, sitting in his shirt-sleeves at a table drawn up close to one of the aforesaid windows, felt himself absolutely panting for air. With a sigh, born partly of physical discomfort, partly of sheer weariness and dejection of spirit, he laid down his pen, and, leaning back in his writing-chair, sat for some minutes staring stupidly at two letters which lay spread out before him, side by side, upon his blotting-book.

One of these was in his own handwriting ; the other, which had reached him only twelve hours since, bore the signature of Dorothy Temple.

It was a very short letter, this of Dorothy's; very simply expressed, and — one might have fancied — easy of comprehension. Yet, even after Lyon had read it through some half-dozen times, he had had difficulty in realising the truth that it conveyed. It seemed impossible to believe that all was indeed over; that the last slender chance of happiness had slipped through his fingers. And yet from the first he had — so he supposed — schooled himself to expect nothing from Fate, less than nothing from the generosity of such a man as Brian Travers.

He knew now that, in spite of this schooling, he had, in his secret heart of hope, expected everything from one or the other.

And his illogical confidence had played him false. Fate had not gone out of its way to work a miracle on his behalf; neither had Brian acted (who but a semi-lunatic would ever have dreamed of his acting?) in direct defiance of his natural disposition. Things had fallen out exactly as any man endowed with ordinary common-sense must have foreseen they would fall out, and the Nothing which Lyon's reason had so frequently assured him would be his portion, *was* his portion. He might say farewell to his absurd plans for a new life, his unsubstantial dreams of a future which could never be realised. From henceforward there was only one course open to him: that of an unwilling return to the old objectless, spiritless, purposeless existence—the

old wearisome attempt to kill time by means of pastimes which had lost their savour—the old wretched inability to get up a real, hearty, honest interest in anything—the old bitter scorn for his fellow-creatures (rendered doubly bitter now by a new and most sincere contempt for himself). Certainly the prospect before him was not a cheering one. If his life for years past had seemed to him scarcely worth living, what of these coming years, in which he saw himself by anticipation growing more and more disgusted with self and the world? Envious now, not only of other men's successes, but of other men's happinesses; tortured by the ache of unsatisfied passion; stung to impotent rage by the consciousness that his own loss was another's gain—and that other, one whom he honestly held unworthy of the prize destiny had decreed to him? Musing on his prospect, which stretched itself out before his mind's eye with such cruel clearness that he seemed to be already living in the midst of the sandy waste he surveyed, it was small wonder if his dark face took on its hardest and most forbidding expression, the brows drawn close together in a painful frown, the compressed lips tightening more and more into an unyielding straight line.

“Well, it's a prospect that doesn't bear thinking about,” he said to himself at length, getting up and pushing back his chair. “Fortunately—or unfortunately—one can live through anything

—with the help of regular meals and an undamaged constitution. I see myself still cumbering the earth at eighty—preaching cheap cynicism at my club to any one I can induce to listen to me—and making life a burden to my valet.”

He crossed slowly over to one of the open windows, and, resting both arms upon the sill, leaned out into the night. It was a dark night, illuminated only by “the faint light of stars”; the massive outlines of a group of cedars on the left barely detached themselves from the prevailing soft gloom. Immediately in front of the window, the ground fell rapidly into a slope, and at the end of this slope—perhaps a quarter of a mile away—a group of twinkling lights proclaimed the presence of the pit-village; a presence further proclaimed by the medley of sounds which, every now and then, disturbed the stillness of the night air, sounds of the barking of dogs, intermingled with snatches of hoarse and unmusical song, and a confused noise of men’s voices in angry (and apparently tipsy) dispute. Lyon listened to this unlovely concert with a faint smile not pleasant to see.

“‘You have so much to fill your life,’” he quoted to himself from the letter lying on the table behind him. “Yes, so much indeed, Miss Temple! I possess the inestimable privilege of being able to shut a public-house or two against those drunken beasts yonder—so long as I’m prepared to be stoned for my pains; I

can afford to reglaze the reading-room windows as often as my public-spirited tenants please to break them—and that's about once a week, on an average. No doubt, I ought not to complain—my life is a full one. I wish to heaven I had never set foot inside Creighton's doors!"

He lifted himself from his leaning position, and began to walk up and down the room. "No,"—pausing, after a while, in his walk,— "on reflection, that's a lie. I'm not sorry, on the whole. Indeed, I'm not sure I regret anything. Her marrying Travers is rank folly, and a hideous mistake; at the same time, she spoke truly: if she had let me persuade her to break her word to him, she would not have been the woman I took her for — and take her for still, since she has refused to be persuaded. It's something to keep *one* ideal unshattered. One pays for it, of course, as one pays for everything in this world. It may be I'm paying too much—more than the ideal's worth, intrinsically. We won't probe that question too nicely. Having lost the substance, I may as well try to persuade myself that I prefer a shadow."

Taking up Dorothy's letter from the table, he read it through once more. "She is certainly very guileless," he commented bitterly, on coming to the end. "Or very self-deceiving—which is it? She calls him generous, because he asked no questions. As if his asking no

questions were not the most consummate proof of shameless selfishness he could have given. If he *had* asked questions—if he had insisted on probing the reason of her conviction that she could never care for him—if he had drawn any kind of confession from her—why, then, for very shame he must have released her from her promise. He was too wary to do anything of the kind. Instead of asking questions, he settles the marriage for September. Generous? It is a cur's action—the action of a man who simply wants his way, and will use any means in order to get it—to whom *she* is nothing, her happiness nothing, apart from his own wishes. Could not she have seen that—ought she not to have seen it?—Well, what use if she had? The recognition of his baseness would only have made her sacrifice of herself more painful. It would not have absolved her, in her own sight, from the obligation to keep faith with him.”

He laid the letter down again. “That fellow has missed a great chance—if only he knew it. He might have been a hero in her eyes for ever. What right have I, though, to reproach him for not acting like a hero? My own conduct has been unheroic enough. What have I done, but add to her burden by reproaches and entreaties which hurt her cruelly—as I intended they should do—though she had too much strength and loyalty to let them influence her decision. I need not flatter myself that I shall

cut any other than a sorry figure in her memory—as the man who did his best to make her false to his friend. No, no ; instead of casting stones at Brian Travers, I should do better to sit down and realise what a singularly contemptible part I have played myself in this business.”

His eye fell at this moment upon the second sheet of paper lying on the blotting-book—his own reply to Dorothy’s letter. Couched in even briefer terms than the note it acknowledged, it consisted only of half a dozen lines. His face softened a little as he re-read these lines.

“At least, I have written nothing here which would give her a fresh right to despise me,” was his reflection. “I have acquiesced in her decision—she could not expect me to rejoice in it. And I have neither lamented nor reproached ; I have even forbore to warn her afresh that she is making a mistake.”

He folded the letter carefully and put it into an envelope. “And yet,” he added, pausing with the envelope in his hand before closing it, “it *is* a mistake—a more awful one than she guesses. She has undertaken more than her strength will bear—pledged herself to more than she can possibly pay. And when she recognises the truth—then God help her ! for she will assuredly find no help in Brian Travers.”

PART II

*“ God loved Hussein—and would not suffer him
to attain to anything.”*

CHAPTER I

AT SAN LORENZO

"The sun may shine, and we be cold."

"TAKE care of Dolly, Robin. And don't go out of sight, either of you."

"No, mummy dear, we won't. Catch hold of my hand, Dolly. No, don't begin picking them yet; they're ever so much bigger higher up."

"They" were the white narcissus flowers with which the olive terraces leading up to San Lorenzo's rude shrine are literally carpeted in the early days of April. From her seat at the foot of a great grey olive—a patriarch among his brethren—growing half-way up the northern side of that long ridge of hill from the top of which, looking southwards, the eye travels past the outlying white villas of San Remo to the blue waters of the Mediterranean, Robin's mother beheld a veritable sea of starry blossoms spreading, in climbing waves, above, below, and on every side of her, as far as her sight could reach. The all-glorifying sunshine of an Italian

spring morning bathed the flower-clothed slope with a flood of light, and shimmered mysteriously between the grey-green leaves, and along the fantastically-twisted boughs, and down the gnarled silvery trunks of the hoary old trees that at intervals overshadowed it. Every now and then a tiny breeze, wafted across the hill-top from the unseen sea on the other side, would pass through the branches of the olives with a rustling sigh, and set the whole floral company clustered round their ancient roots dancing daintily for a moment.

Some women would have found it occupation enough, on such a morning, to sit idle in the olive-shade, and watch for the recurring delicate puff of air which never failed to wake so pretty a response among the trees overhead and the flowers underfoot. Not so Robin's mother. Her children had no sooner left her, than she took up a book and began to read diligently. And if, now and then, her eyes wandered involuntarily from the printed page before them to the exquisite surroundings of her place of study, she never suffered them to play truant long, but recalled them almost immediately—once or twice with a movement of impatience—to more serious employment.

The voices of the little narcissus-pickers grew more and more indistinct, dwindled, and finally died away into the distance; still the mother read on undisturbed. Apparently she imagined

it unnecessary to watch her children closely ; trusting either to a general habit of obedience on their part, or to the stability of Robin's plighted word, she seemed to take it for granted that they would not dream of transgressing her command. When, therefore, she at length closed her book and glanced round,—to find that the boy and girl had alike vanished wholly from view,—her surprise was as great as her alarm.

Certainly, Robin had altogether failed to keep his readily-given promise. In justice to him, however,—as a small boy of honourable principles,—it should be said that he had given the promise in all good faith, and that his failure to keep it might fairly be accounted to him as an error rather than a crime. At seven years old, with thousands of the *Narcissus poeticus* above and around one, only waiting to be picked,—those a little farther off, a little higher up, always looking larger and whiter than those quite near at hand,—it would be strange indeed if one did not after a while forget to turn back dutifully every two minutes or so, just to make sure that the skirt of one's mother's gown was still easily visible in the distance ;—poor mother ! who, strange to say, did not seem to care about picking flowers herself. Then, Robin's already divided mind was further distracted by the care of Dolly,—Dolly, two years his junior, a sadly short-legged

and short-winded climber, needing much assistance in her scrambles from terrace to terrace, and terribly given to dropping her own and her brother's joint spoils out of the gathered-up corners of her frock, whenever Robin failed for an instant to keep a watchful eye upon them and her. Burdened thus with many cares, and lured onward a step at a time by the temptation to add finer and yet finer specimens to his store, Robin, without any intention of disobedience in his heart, found himself atop of the ridge and going down the other side—honestly unconscious of having done evil, until the sparkle of the sea revealed to him how far he had strayed from the bounds set by his mother's order.

This revelation took him considerably aback ; but he gave his dismay no voice. Indeed, his first impulse was to conceal it from Dolly,—Dolly, whom he had been at immense pains to train into an attitude of unswerving respect for himself—respect which, he felt instinctively, any unguarded admission of wrong-doing or weakness on his own part must seriously affect. He merely remarked, therefore, with a finely-simulated air of carelessness—

“Come, we've got enough now. We'll go back.”

“Lots more,” observed Dolly succinctly—emphasising her observation by pointing with a fat forefinger to the terraces below. “Big ones.”

"Yes, I see," returned masculine wisdom in a superior manner. "But it's too late to get those to-day. We can come again to-morrow. Oh, Dolly! *do* keep your frock up! You'll have them all out again, if you don't take care."

"Bring baskets to -morrow," interrupted Dolly—unheeding of reproaches and warnings alike. "And pick them *all*."

"I don't know if we *could* pick them all." Robin shook his head over the undertaking. "They're such a lot, you see—we might try, though"—brightening. "Perhaps, if we came *very* early, and brought our dinner in one of the baskets— Now, hold up your frock—tight, with both hands—and I'll hold your arm"—

"Where we going now?" Dolly inquired.

"Why, back to mummy, of course!" Robin spoke the more boldly and confidently that he was secretly beginning to feel some uncertainty as to "mummy's" exact whereabouts. "She's down on the other side, by that funny big tree that's all empty inside—don't you 'member?"

Dolly "'membered" the tree in question well enough—quite as well as Robin himself. Unfortunately, it turned out that with neither of them did remembrance of the giant hollow-trunked olive extend to its position among the other olives. In vain did Robin say airily, "This way," and, when "this way" proved to be the wrong one, turn undaunted in the opposite direction; he had lost his bearings, and could

not hit upon the path of return. Among ranks upon ranks of terraces, each terrace just like the other, all alike planted with olives, all carpeted alike with white narcissus, the topographical instinct of a tourist of seven may easily become hopelessly bewildered. In less than ten minutes, the dreadful truth that he and his sister were *lost* had dawned upon Robin's youthful mind.

Before the contemplation of this overwhelming catastrophe, even Robin's regard for his dignity momentarily gave way. His confession of the dismal truth to Dolly was made to an accompaniment of unmanly sobs—with the natural result that Dolly, though really much less impressed by the perils of their position,—not being as yet promoted, like her brother, to fairy-tales in two syllables, and thus made perfectly aware of the awful dangers to which lost children are invariably exposed,—began to cry lustily for company. At the sound of her loud wailing, Robin made a generous effort to pull himself together.

"Don't cry, Doll," he adjured her valiantly, rubbing away his own tears manfully with his knuckles. "P'r'aps they'll find us before—before we die. And I s'pose there aren't any wild beasts in this wood; 'cos if there were, mother wouldn't let us come here at all. Only those boys in the Sunday book used to play on the edge of a forest that had lions in it, and the

lions didn't hurt them unless they went too far in—I wonder if we're far in?"

"Would the lions eat us?" inquired Dolly in an awestruck, tremulous whisper.

"Of course they would. I haven't got a spear to fight them with, you see, like the boy in the book. But I'll tell you what, Doll—if the robber-captain comes, I'll fight *him* for you"—

"Will he be sure to come?"

"I don't know. There's a man coming up the hill now—but he doesn't look quite like him. He's got such ord'n'y clothes on," observed Robin in a depreciatory tone, "and a hat just like father's. Oh, how fast he does walk!" clutching Dolly's arm in a paroxysm of mingled terror and admiration. "Just look! he'll be up here in a minute"—

In truth, the newcomer on the scene—a big, broad-shouldered, strongly-built man, prosaically arrayed in the short tweed coat, knickerbockers, and comfortable if unbecoming straw hat which together constitute the ordinary livery of the actively-disposed Briton on his summer travels—was mounting the series of terraces which still lay between him and the bent and crooked old olive, under which the two children had stopped short when Robin first began to expound the true nature of their situation to his sister, at a rate which not only spoke well for the strength of his wind and limb, but was

calculated to strike the mind of an aspiring athlete in his eighth year with absolute awe. In the interest of watching the magnificent length and ease of the stranger's ascending strides, Robin forgot to think of his possibly sinister character and evil purposes towards himself and Dolly; and Dolly, faithful to her *rôle* of copyist, dried her eyes also, and for a while imitated Robin by staring at the active tourist with all her might. However, when—as presently happened—he gained the topmost terrace, and, passing close to the two children, glanced at them inquiringly for a moment, Dolly's alarms renewed themselves, and she shrank fearfully behind her brother.

“What are you afraid of, you silly little thing?” demanded Robin in a low voice—contemptuously, indeed, but yet not unkindly. (He was quite aware that one cannot expect a girl to face danger in the unmoved manner peculiar to his own sex.) “Can't you see it's just a gentleman?”

“He had such a big stick,” whimpered Dolly in self-excuse.

“Well, don't all grown-up men have big sticks, stupid? I wish,” quoth Robin, growing very brave indeed—“I wish I'd spoken to him, and asked him to help us find mummy. He looked rather cross, but I'm sure he was an English gentleman. I've a great mind to run after him now; I could catch him if I ran very

fast. And I *can* run very fast when I'm without you"—

But here Dolly, terrified at the idea of being left for a time alone, lifted up so vehement a voice of protest against the daring plan, that Robin was forced to abandon it. Perhaps he was not altogether sorry to be precluded from displaying his heroism in so extreme a fashion.

Meanwhile, the big Englishman continued his rapid road downhill, wholly unconscious of the admiration he had excited—and without the smallest inkling of the distressing position in which he had left his diminutive admirers. The children's good looks—Robin was a singularly handsome boy, while little Dolly, if she could not boast very regular features, had been well-endowed by nature in the matter of pink cheeks and yellow locks—had attracted his notice for an instant; then he passed on, and thought no more about them. The fact of their being alone made no impression—no particular impression whatever—upon his mind; and, even had it done so, such impression would at once have been neutralised by the very natural following reflection that a guardian of some kind—mother, nurse, or governess—must undoubtedly be in the near neighbourhood. Under no circumstances, therefore, short of receiving a direct appeal for assistance, would he have dreamed that it could be incumbent upon him, as a benevolent passer-by, to proceed

to the succour of these modern babes in the wood.

Very soon, thanks to his active movements, he found himself halfway down the long slope. Here, where two paths struck off in opposite directions into the woods, he paused suddenly ; and, having first looked about him irresolutely for a minute or two, with the air of a man reconnoitring unknown ground, took out a small pocket-map, and consulted it with attention. The result of this consultation was that he presently took the path to his left, and resumed his course—still a downward one—at an even increased rate of speed.

The path on which he had entered, guided by his map, scarcely merited so respectable a name—being little more than a mule-track of the roughest description, full of huge rolling stones brought down by a winter torrent. It was tortuous as well as steep, with innumerable sharp turns and corners ; corners so sharp that our pedestrian, swinging rapidly round one of them, narrowly escaped knocking over a lady who, coming from the opposite direction, was ascending the hill at nearly as great a pace as he himself was descending it. But for the aid of the formidable stick which had struck so deep a terror into Dolly's timid little soul, he could hardly have stopped himself in time to avert this catastrophe. Even as it was, the lady, startled, and already out of breath by

reason of her own previous haste, staggered back a pace or two, and must have completely lost her balance,—an accident which, seeing the path ran alongside the brink of a deep ravine, might have been attended with very serious consequences,—had not he had the presence of mind to catch her by the arm.

“I beg your pardon! I beg ten thousand pardons!” he exclaimed, hastily releasing her as she regained her equilibrium. “I should have looked better where I was going—but one grows careless in these lonely places. Pray allow me to apologise most sincerely”—

He broke off suddenly and completely in the midst of his vigorous expressions of regret; a light of recognition—that for an instant seemed *glad* recognition—flashed over his strong, sombre face with the effect of sheet-lightning playing upon a mass of dark rock, and was gone. Then he spoke again, in a slightly altered voice—

“I am the more sorry—now I see—I beg your pardon for not recognising you at once . . . Mrs. Travers.” (He hesitated perceptibly before uttering this name, as though it had cost him some effort of memory to recall it.) “Excuse my stupidity—my double stupidity. This is such an unexpected . . . pleasure.” (Again he seemed to have been searching for the right word; and this time—to judge from the dissatisfied and thoroughly unjoyous tone in which he uttered that he finally elected to use—he

had been baulked in his search.) "I hope you are quite well?" And he half extended his hand.

"Quite, thank you." Robin's mother was very pale. She did not seem to observe the hand half offered her, and its owner therefore prudently proceeded to withdraw it.

"I am afraid I have been unfortunate enough to frighten you," he observed, as he did so, in a tone quite remarkable for its frigidity. "It was abominably careless of me; one has no business to rush round corners in that heedless fashion."

"Oh, that was nothing!" she averred eagerly. "It did not matter—pray don't trouble yourself."

"One is naturally annoyed to know that one has startled a lady half out of her wits."

"I am not so easily startled out of my wits, I hope," she retorted, in something of her old quick fashion. "I *am* frightened—but that's for another reason altogether. I am in great distress about my children—my two little children. I can't find them anywhere."

"You cannot find . . . your children?" He said the words slowly; they refused to come trippingly from his tongue.

"No. They were picking flowers while I read, and somehow they wandered out of sight without my noticing it. I shall never forgive myself! I have called to them again and again;

I can't make them hear me. I don't know what to do—where to go. Mr. Lyon, you will help me to look for them?"

"With pleasure," Lyon answered politely. "But it seems to me you are alarming yourself unnecessarily," eyeing her white face and quivering lips with what she felt to be a coldly disapproving look. "Remember, they are not likely to come to any harm in these olive-gardens. And finding them can only be a question of time."

"But Dolly is such a little thing, and so easily frightened! She is particularly afraid of dogs,—the sight of a big dog nearly frightens her into a fit,—and most of the caretakers in these gardens keep such savage ones. And Robin is very rash and adventurous; he may lead her into all sorts of places—most dangerous places." A thrill of terror was in Dorothy's voice, and her mouth worked convulsively.

But here, luckily, Lyon bethought himself of the small couple he had passed on the hilltop so short a time before.

"*Two* children, I think you said? Boy and girl? the girl the younger of the two? That's all right! I've not a doubt I met them just now—not more than five minutes ago."

"Where?" Dorothy inquired breathlessly.

"Up yonder; just on the crest of the ridge," he signed over his shoulder. "Was the girl dressed in white, with a kind of sun-bonnet thing on her head, and light hair?"

"Yes, yes, that's Dolly! And Robin had on a sailor suit."

"The same, then. I'll go and fetch them down. You can sit here and rest till they arrive. No, really, you had better not come any farther yourself; this path is excessively rough. I will tell . . . your children"—again that scarcely perceptible pause—"that you have commanded me to recall them, and they shall be with you in a very few moments. Only don't move away from this spot, I beg. Because, if you do move, you will certainly reduce us to the necessity of searching for you."

He turned away, and, without heeding either her thanks or her protestations, shot up the path he had just come down at a pace it would assuredly have been impossible for her—even though spurred by maternal anxiety—to emulate. A curious smile flitted about the corners of his lips as he went.

"Well, Fate does certainly seem to take a malicious pleasure in baulking all our forecasts!" was his inward reflection. "I fancied I had exhausted in imagination all the circumstances that could possibly attend such a *rencontre* as this. It appears I was mistaken. Of course, after eight years, one is—or should be—prepared for anything. I was equally prepared to find her annoyed by my reappearance, or civilly indifferent to it. But—too pre-occupied even to go through the formality of

shaking hands! and, at the same time, quite ready to make use of me as a runner of errands on behalf of Brian's children—that's a conjunction I did not anticipate. Ah, here are the youngsters! They have had the good sense not to extend their wanderings farther."

They had not, in fact, moved from the shelter of the tree under which Lyon had seen them first. Reassured, perhaps, by the metamorphosis of the supposed robber-captain into a peaceable tourist, they had apparently resolved to await the course of events, and, in the meanwhile, to get what fun they could out of their perplexing situation. So they had settled down in the shade of the crooked olive; and while Dolly, seated on its roots, engaged in some mysterious game with the flowers in her lap, Robin, with a broken-off bough, which he had carefully stripped of its leaves, poised on his shoulder to represent a rifle, was stalking up and down in front of her, keeping sentry.

Perceiving Lyon's massive figure emerging once more from among the olives, the boy stopped short in his martial walk and faced the returning intruder with an outward and assumed calmness, much at variance with the inward misgivings which the stranger's unexpected reappearance aroused in his mind.

Lyon's first utterance was not calculated to lay these misgivings to rest. Unused to deal with children, he failed to see that the case was

one for cautious advances, and proceeded to deliver himself bluntly of his commission.

"You're young Travers, I suppose?" he said interrogatively. Robin nodded, grasping his olive-bough very tightly in his small clammy hand. "I've been sent to fetch you and your sister."

Here Dolly rose precipitately to her feet, tumbling every narcissus in her lap to the ground. But for once Robin took no heed of her misdemeanours. His great dark eyes were fixed, in mingled curiosity and apprehension, upon his formidable-looking interlocutor, whose mode of address was so suspiciously suggestive of the robber-captain, if his garments could not be said to dress the part appropriately. But then, robber-captains have been known to disguise themselves before now.

Being a plucky little fellow at heart, however, Robin resolved not to yield without a struggle to the perfidious foe. "Where do you want to take us?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Down the hill to your mother. Do you know that she has been looking everywhere for you. You have frightened her to death by running off in this fashion," said Lyon severely, having a vague idea that it was his duty to improve the occasion by administering some kind of reproof.

Robin let the reproof pass. But he still continued to eye Lyon with distrust. Vague

recollections of blood-curdling histories of children lured to enchanted castles by means of false messages stirred uncomfortably in his small brain. "What's your name?" he asked.

"My name is Lyon," gravely returned the owner of the patronymic, beginning to understand something of the humour of the situation.

"And are you a friend of mummy's?"

Lyon paused an instant before replying "Yes."

"I never saw you before," was Master Travers' comment.

"I daresay not. I never saw *you* before, either. It's many years since I saw your mother—or your father."

"Did you know mummy when she was a little girl like me?" interrupted Dolly, who had suddenly become much interested in the conversation.

"She was rather older than you. Come," said Lyon, who felt that he had answered questions enough, and that further catechising might become inconvenient. "We mustn't keep her waiting any longer. Pick up your flowers and let us go."

Robin, reassured as to the stranger's good intentions—it seemed impossible to suspect evil of a person who had known "mummy" when she was a little girl—and overawed by his imperious manner, made no further attempt to create delay. The floral treasure which Dolly had scattered abroad—by this time growing

somewhat the worse for wear—was once more collected, and the trio were soon on their way downhill.

“How came you to stray away like this?” Mr. Lyon inquired presently, chiefly with the object of making conversation,—an object which he fully attained by his well-chosen question, for Robin’s voluble explanations had hardly come to an end before that sharp turn of the path which Lyon had rounded so unthinkingly twenty minutes before, to find so great a surprise awaiting him beyond, brought the little party within sight of Mrs. Travers.

She stood, leaning against the trunk of an olive, her hands knit together in front of her, looking up the path for the first sign of the children’s approach, her whole attitude curiously expressive of the constraint she was putting upon herself in remaining stationary. Seeing her, Robin broke into a subdued whoop of delight.

“There she is! I must run!” he exclaimed. “Take care of Dolly, please, Mr. Lyon. She can’t walk very well on big stones.” And he flew down the rough path, agile and sure-footed as a young roe, straight into Dorothy’s waiting arms.

The meeting between mother and son made a pretty picture enough; and so, perhaps, Mr. Lyon thought, for he stood a moment contemplating it, quite oblivious of his small com-

panion's presence, until he felt a pull at his sleeve and heard a grave little voice saying—

“I take your hand, please.”

A baby Dorothy—with Dorothy Temple's eyes, hair, features—stood looking up into his face in placid, confident appeal. He gave a slight, involuntary start—it was the first time he had observed the child with any particular attention, most of his notice having been necessarily given to the dark-eyed, talkative boy, whose every feature and gesture proclaimed him Brian Travers' son—then he stooped down and said in a carefully softened voice—

“Suppose I carry you? How would that be?”

“No, thank you,” replied Dolly, with much dignity. “I don't like being carried. Take my hand, please.”

So, hand in hand, the oddly-assorted pair stepped on together, and reached Dorothy's side without mishap.

“I don't know how to thank you properly!” Mrs. Travers exclaimed, turning at last to Lyon, who, quietly observant, had stood by with a perfectly impassive countenance, while little Dolly received her share of glad caresses. “It was so good of you—so very, very kind! And, really, I must apologise for my behaviour just now—when I first met you. I was quite distracted. I believe I hardly said so much as ‘How do you do?’”

"No one would have expected you to observe such formalities under the circumstances," Lyon returned, in his old level, non-committal tone.

Dorothy glanced at him quickly — perhaps suspecting a covert sarcasm. But her suspicions found no confirmation in his expression, which connoted nothing beyond grave attention.

"Are you staying in San Remo?" she asked.

"For a short time—yes. And you?"

"We have been here some weeks already. I don't know exactly how much longer we may remain."

"Your first visit to the Riviera?"

"Oh no! We come to San Remo every year, for our annual seaside outing. Living in Italy, as we have done for the last five years—Perhaps you heard that Brian was appointed, five years ago, to be surveyor of the Bussana railway—that new line they are carrying through the Romagna? No? I thought—Jem might"—

"Jem is a wretched correspondent, Mrs. Travers, as you doubtless know by this time. He has not written to me for years. So I had heard nothing. But I'm glad to hear now. Surveyor of the Bussana line, I think you said? That must be a pleasant berth for Brian. I hope he likes it?"

"Oh yes! He was delighted when he found he had been elected. We hardly hoped the directors would be prevailed upon to give it to an Englishman."

"No; in this land of engineers, one would have expected a foreigner to have small chance of getting any post of the kind. All the more gratifying for Brian. The only drawback to such an appointment is the expatriation it involves. But perhaps you don't object to that? You like Italy?"

"I love it," Dorothy answered warmly. "I am so sorry to think we must leave it very soon. The line is all but completed now," she explained, "and I don't suppose my husband is likely to find fresh work in this country."

"You dislike the idea of going back to England?"

"I am afraid we shall have to go a good deal farther afield than England." (Lyon noticed that she left his question really without an answer, though she seemed to reply to it.) "The market there is so terribly overstocked. Hush, darling! in a moment"—this to Dolly, who was pulling at her mother's hand, and suggesting in an audible tone that they should "go home and have dinner." "They get such appetites, living this open-air life," she added apologetically to Lyon. "You must excuse"—

"Hurrah!" struck in Robin from the summit of the bank bordering the path on the right hand side, to which he had laboriously climbed while the foregoing conversation was in progress. "I think I see the top of father's hat—a long, long way off—quite low down among

the trees. May I run and meet him, mummy?"

"Better not, dear. You don't know which path he may take. He promised to meet us somewhere about this time"—turning again to Lyon. "He has been out all the morning, taking photographs. Perhaps, if you are not in a hurry, you will wait a moment and see him? I know he would be so glad."

"Thanks; I should like to meet him again. So he has caught the fashionable photography-fever? Has he taken it very badly?"

"Did you ever know any one take it mildly?" returned Dorothy, smiling. "Yes, my Dolly, we are going home directly, as soon as father comes."

"Is Mr. Lyon coming with us?" Robin inquired eagerly — so eagerly that his mother launched an anxious look in his direction. But to her surprise, Lyon's rejoinder—"Perhaps I may walk part of the way back with you, if your mother has no objection"—was met by an enthusiastic ejaculation of "That's jolly!" on Robin's part, which quite drowned her own modestly murmured, "Of course, I shall be very glad."

"I feel extremely flattered," observed Lyon, with an odd, fleeting smile which Robin did not half like, and which caused him, for a moment, to hesitate in making the request already on his lips. Rallying his courage, however, he swung himself down the bank, and, sidling close up to

his new acquaintance, asked in a highly confidential tone—

“You *will* show me how to get up the terraces as fast as you do, won’t you? If we ran on in front a little way, we could practise all the way home. Mother always walks so slow, because of Dolly.”

“Robin!” interposed Dorothy, catching the whisper, and flushing distressfully. “You must not ask Mr. Lyon to run about with you. I daresay he is tired.”

“Oh, he can’t be tired! Why, he ran ever so quick when he came to fetch us!” was Robin’s confident rejoinder.

“That’s the very reason for his being tired now. Remember, he had to climb quite a long hill in search of you two naughty little lost children, and climbing hills in a hurry is very tiring. Isn’t it, Mr. Lyon?”

“The excuse will serve, thank you. I am not very happy in children’s society,” Lyon added, speaking more hurriedly than was usual with him—he felt that his deliberate churlishness needed some apology; at the same time, he was quite determined to show Mrs. Travers that he had no mind to let himself be turned into a playmate for her spoilt imps;—“I don’t pretend to understand them, and I never know what to say to them. I don’t believe I could play with a child to save my life! I’m afraid you’ll have to wait a good many years before you can get up the terraces as quickly as I do, my man,” he

concluded, turning to Robin, who was still looking up at him with pleading eyes. "It's a question between long legs and short ones, you see."

Considerably crestfallen, and uncomfortably conscious that he had received a snub, Robin withdrew to a little distance. A moment's silence ensued. Perhaps Mrs. Travers, too, felt chilled and thrown back upon herself. A puzzled expression crossed her face; perhaps she was asking herself what she had done or said to excite Mr. Lyon's displeasure. Lyon interrupted her self-questionings by asking abruptly—

"And your brother-in-law? Where and how is he?"

"Jem is in India. He has been there for—let me see—over six years now. Ever since his father's death."

"Doing the barefooted friar business?"

"He has joined the Brotherhood of St. Philip—yes," returned Mrs. Travers. "You know, that was always the desire of his heart."

Lyon nodded. "I remember. Well, I hope he finds the delights of itinerant missionary life—in sandals—all his fancy painted them. You look as if you felt some doubt on that score. Has Jem betrayed any disappointment?"

"No. I have no right to say he is not thoroughly satisfied. Only now and then, the tone of his letters has led me to think"—

"That the desire of his heart has turned out—not so very desirable after all? Poor Travers!"

But he might have foreseen his fate. If there's one thing more foolish than cherishing high-minded plans for benefiting one's fellow-creatures, it's attempting to put them into practice. In what part of India does his work lie?"

"At first he had his headquarters in Calcutta, and only made journeys in Bengal. But latterly they have moved him about a good deal. He rather hoped to have been sent to the North-West last year; but the Superior decided otherwise. Just now, he is in Tinnevely, I believe."

"He has never worked in the North-West?"

"No."

"Ah, that accounts for our paths having failed to cross! I am fresh from India myself," Lyon explained, in answer to Dorothy's inquiring look. "But most of my time there—I may say all of it—was spent in the North-West. Here comes Brian, evidently! Not much altered, after all these years. Though I see he has taken to wearing a beard."

Before he could finish his sentence, Brian was actually upon them, talking, laughing, uttering eager exclamations of pleasure. Lyon, whose natural reserve and hatred of emotional scenes was that of the ordinary Englishman of his age and class tenfold intensified, found his old schoolfellow's enthusiastic greetings a little too exuberant for his personal taste. He was even inclined to suspect that such extravagant expressions of delight—for extravagant they seemed to him—must necessarily be insincere;

by which unkind suspicion he quite wronged poor Brian, whose whole offence really consisted in the fact that he had, during his five years' residence in Italy, unconsciously caught something of the excitable manner and gestures of the men who were his daily colleagues. His volubility and animation on the present occasion were in no way assumed; they were the legitimate result of a feeling of genuine satisfaction. He was honestly glad to see Lyon; he was even better pleased that Lyon should see him in the new and agreeable position of a successful man. Lyon had known him in his humiliation; it was well that Lyon should know him also in his triumph. Brian was one of those persons who habitually give magnificent names to the events of their lives.

He stood, therefore, wreathed in smiles,—his teeth were as fine and white as ever,—pouring forth ejaculations, asking friendly questions, and nearly wringing Lyon's hand off; while that taciturn and inexpansive person returned brief and business-like replies to his numerous eager inquiries. As Lyon had perceived at once, a whole decade had wrought but little change in his outward man. His good looks were almost as remarkable now as they had been when he was ten years younger. If the square-cut Italian beard, by partially concealing the fine oval of his face, detracted a little from its classic beauty, it added to it, on the other hand, a much-needed suggestion of strength,

the one thing formerly lacking to its cameo-like perfection.

"Who would have thought of meeting you here!" he ejaculated joyously, contemplating Lyon with pleased eyes. "Where did you drop from? and how long have you been in these parts?"

"I only arrived from Brindisi last night."

"Curious, our coming across each other at once! A great stroke of luck!"

"It was, indeed, a stroke of luck, my meeting Mr. Lyon when I did," Dorothy said. And she explained the manner of that meeting, and gave an account of Lyon's subsequent services. "Yes, it was very lucky. For I had not the remotest idea what direction the children had taken. They had been gone some time."

"And you were fast approaching the verge of lunacy, I doubt not," her husband put in good-naturedly. "You chose the moment of your appearance well, Lyon, if you wanted an effusive welcome. But how did you manage to identify each other? Surely you've never"—

"Oh yes, you forget!"—Dorothy did not give her husband time to finish his sentence. "Mr. Lyon came to Heyford one summer, while you were in Queensland,—don't you remember?—and stayed at The Haulms."

"Ah, I do remember hearing something about it, now you remind me. The summer of my poor mother's death, wasn't it? Well, I'm glad you two don't meet as strangers. Always sup-

posing" — Brian added, with his old bright laugh—"that both of you have pleasant recollections of your former acquaintance. Did he snub you systematically, Dorothy? Because, if I recollect right, that was his ordinary fashion of dealing with young women in those days."

"I think Mrs. Travers will acquit me of anything so deliberately unamiable as systematic snubbing," Lyon said, before Dorothy's reply was quite ready. "I may add that it wasn't very easy to snub her. Of course, I made myself highly disagreeable to her now and then, I've no doubt. Constituted as I am, it's hardly possible I should have failed to do *that*."

"But, on the whole, you were good friends? That's satisfactory. You don't find Dorothy much altered? She does the Italian climate credit, doesn't she?"

"Mrs. Travers certainly looks very well."

"I am very well," Dorothy said.

To all appearance, her boast was justified. She had lost something, perhaps, of her early bright bloom, but her fair complexion still retained the smooth clearness of perfect health; her hair, under her pretty spring hat, seemed as abundant as ever; her figure, if it had grown a little fuller, was still slight and firm and supple, upright in carriage, and active in all its movements; and, as regards actual beauty, she was certainly prettier at thirty than she had been at twenty-two. She had gained besides in grace, in charm, in distinction—in all those indefinable

qualities which go far to make a passably good-looking woman into a positively pretty one; and she was singularly well dressed. It was easy to see that she had acquired a habit of taking pains with herself, of studying the becoming, and giving serious thought to her clothes. Her morning costume, simple and entirely appropriate to the rustic occasion though it was, had not been adopted haphazard, for mere comfort or convenience' sake; it bore unmistakable traces of careful design.

"I am perfectly well," she said, smiling,—and her smile, like her new prettiness of face and new daintiness of dress, roused a sense of vague irritation in Lyon; it was so unlike Dorothy Temple's smile, as he remembered it. "So is Brian; so are the children. We are a singularly robust party."

"Yes, we are all so extraordinarily, prosaically healthy," her husband chimed in, "that now and then we feel out of place in a health resort. It seems as if we lacked all justification for coming here so often. Well, I needn't inquire after your health, Lyon, I presume?"

"No, thanks; I'm very fit."

"You don't look a day older than when I last saw you in Half-Moon Street! What is it, Dorothy? Must we be moving already? Why, there's heaps of time—only a quarter to one"—looking at his watch. "You haven't ordered luncheon at any particular hour, have you?"

"Not for ourselves. But the children's dinner

was ordered for one, and they are both hungry, and Dolly is tired."

"Oh, the children!" cried Brian in mock exasperation. "Never were such tyrants as those youngsters, I assure you, Lyon; my wife and I lead the life of bondslaves to their claims. Want your dinner, Robin, my boy? All right, you shall have it! *En route* with you! We'll follow."

Nothing loath, Robin led the way into the valley, Lyon and Travers, at Dorothy's request, going next, while she brought up the rear with Dolly.

"And what have you been doing with yourself these ten years?" Brian demanded presently of his friend. "We shall expect a full, true, and particular account of your adventures."

"My adventures have been few, and singularly uninteresting, I'm sorry to say. They'll keep, I assure you. From what Mrs. Travers was telling me just now, yours seem to have been of a more gratifying nature. That appointment, for instance."

"Yes, I've found the berth a very pleasant one. And, of course, my being a foreigner made the election something of a special compliment. The worst of it is," said Brian, swinging his Kodak thoughtfully to and fro as he walked, "that my term will be up in June. Then I shall be on the stream again."

"You don't think of applying for a renewal? I understood that a branch line to Santa Anna was in contemplation; and, as a leading member of the old staff, surely you"—

"No, no; no chance in that quarter! They

want the post for one of their own men," Brian interjected quickly, with a half-uneasy glance backward, apparently to see whether Dorothy, who had stopped a moment before to tie the strings of Dolly's sun-bonnet, and was now quickening her pace in order to regain lost ground, were yet within ear-shot. "Fair enough; I've had my turn. No, I shall have to look out for work elsewhere—probably in one of our own colonies. I shouldn't have disliked India, myself, and I think I could get an opening there, perhaps. But my wife is absolutely against India—so that's out of the question."

Half-involuntarily, Lyon looked back at Mrs. Travers, who was now close behind him, with an interrogative expression.

"I could not take the children to India," she said.

The words were very quietly and simply spoken. But he understood, nevertheless, that this question of taking or leaving her children was a matter of life and death to the speaker.

"Clearly, in her estimation, 'the children' are first and foremost," he drew his conclusion. "They have made up for everything, filled every void. It's always the way. A woman who cares for her children never seems to have room left for any other feeling. Natural, I suppose—and certainly satisfactory. In the present case, most decidedly satisfactory. Even you," quoth Lyon, contemptuously addressing himself—"even *you*, I hope, are not quite such an ill-conditioned brute as to wish things were otherwise."

CHAPTER II

A PARTIE CARRÉE

"Men study women as they do the barometer ; but they do not understand until the day after."

IT was not during the walk just chronicled that Lyon formulated these sage reflections. All the way to San Remo, Brian, fluent and talkative as of old, gave him no chance of indulging in any reflection whatsoever, and, San Remo being reached, not only insisted on accompanying him as far as his hotel,—situated a quarter of a mile beyond that in which the Travers had taken up their temporary abode,—but on entering it along with him, in order to renew acquaintance with his travelling-companion, another old schoolfellow, now an officer of Engineers, invalided home from India. Thus some time elapsed before any space for meditation was accorded Lyon. Only after Brian had at length taken leave, and a late luncheon had been discussed by himself and Captain Sebright, was he free to establish himself with his pipe under the shade of the biggest pepper-tree in the

hotel-garden—alone, for Sebright, who was suffering from the effects of a recent sunstroke, found a darkened room his best refuge from the glare of the Southern sun at this hour—and there pass the events of the morning in review.

So at last he had encountered Brian Travers' wife! Well, the encounter, if it could not be said to have given him pleasure, might have its salutary effects.

"Nothing," he reflected philosophically, "like a renewal of long-interrupted acquaintanceship for dispelling lingering sentiment! One imagines—knowing all the while that one is a self-deceiving fool, one persists in the imagination—that one's ideal woman must have remained unchanged and unchanging—till one comes across her unexpectedly, 'ripe and real,' with a mind become limited to babies, frocks, and the exigencies of society. In most cases, the ideal is found to have grown fat. Mrs. Travers has failed to carry out the general rule in this respect; but in all others she fulfils it admirably. I daresay many people would find her 'improved'—to me her improvement has simply stripped her of every charm she once had. I had not been five minutes in her company this morning, before I felt myself on the way to recover of all long-standing delusions concerning her; a few more such meetings would make a sane and healthy-minded man of me for the rest of my life. I really don't know why I should have been so absurdly annoyed with Sebright for

blurting out the fact that we had taken our rooms here for three weeks in his usual open-mouthed fashion!—nor yet why I should have perpetrated that perfectly unnecessary lie about a non-existent engagement for to-night, when Travers asked me to dinner. Well,”—knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the low wall on which he sat with a vigour most incautious, seeing that the pipe in question was a valuable meerschaum coloured to perfection,—“if he renews the invitation to-morrow, I’ll accept it.” He struck a match with a slight smile, that went very near to degenerating into a sneer, on his lips. “In the hope of completing my cure, of course. What pitiful hypocrites we are! Do I really want to be well? It strikes me, on the whole, that this process of getting well is about the most painful part of the whole business.”

Of course, Brian, being full of hospitable instincts and a prince of good fellows, did renew his invitation the following morning; and the invitation, this time, included Sebright as well as Lyon. So it was a party of four which assembled at eight o’clock the same evening round one of the dozen little tables in the restaurant of the big hotel on the hill overlooking the promenade and the sea, and spent a couple of hours more or less pleasantly in company. Sebright, like his host, was a fluent talker who loved to hear his own voice, and he and Brian, between them, claimed the lion’s share of the conversation, though Dorothy played her part in it readily

and gracefully enough. Lyon fell back on his old *rôle* of listener—a *rôle* which served the double purpose of saving him the trouble of talking, and affording him leisure in which to study his entertainers comparatively at his ease.

Such observations as he was able to make only confirmed his first impressions: that the past eight years had wrought but little change in Brian Travers, while they had had a positively transforming effect upon Brian's wife. Dorothy, to Lyon's view, had suffered a metamorphosis of her whole individuality; in looks, dress, manner, speech alike, she had become another woman. She assumed no distant or frigid airs, she showed no inclination to stand on the defensive with her quondam lover—whom she addressed, every now and then, with just as much of cordial ease and absence of all embarrassed consciousness, as though he had never been more to her than any other passing summer visitor at Heyford; yet every tone of her voice rang unfamiliarly in Lyon's ear, every fearless meeting of her eyes with his seemed to thrust him further back upon himself, and fill him with a deeper sense of loss and disappointment. He resented less her absolute self-command, her perfect coolness where he himself was concerned,—though he did secretly resent these, even while he acknowledged in his heart that a less impassive demeanour would have lowered her indefinitely in his estimation,—than her display

of qualities and characteristics which, by their newness, made him feel an utter stranger to her. Dorothy Travers' flow of small talk, her ready acquiescence in other people's opinions, her conventional smiles, her little scraps of worldly wisdom and hints of an enlarged experience of men and things interlarding the cautious expression of her views,—all these things, like her Parisian gown and elaborately-dressed hair, were distasteful to Lyon, by so much as they were at variance with his memories of Dorothy Temple. "Superficial! shallow! conventional! unreal!" such were, time after time, his unspoken comments on her contributions to the talk circling about the little round table. "She takes as little real, hearty interest in these things for which she professes enthusiasm, as—as I do." Lyon felt thoroughly aggrieved by this failure on Dorothy's part to fulfil the promise of her girlhood. Somehow the possibility of her failing to fulfil it had never presented itself to his mind. A pronounced sceptic as regards the rest of the human race, he had continued for eight years to cherish an illogical and illimitable belief in one woman. He told himself that he was justly punished for his irrational credulity.

It was easy—or so at least he thought—to understand Mr. and Mrs. Travers, taken singly; considered together, they offered a somewhat more perplexing subject for speculation. What they were, severally, in themselves, Lyon felt

himself qualified to determine out of hand ; what they were in their relations to each other was less strikingly apparent. At the very end of the evening their guest had got no further than the fact that husband and wife seemed to be good friends ; that Brian's manner to Dorothy, if no longer lover-like, was at any rate unfailingly courteous and good-humoured, while Dorothy, on her side, showed a laudable desire to follow the lead of her lord and master in her choice or avoidance of topics of conversation.

Both Travers and Sebright had so much to tell each other of their several experiences during the past decade, that Lyon began to hope he should be spared all question on the subject of his own insignificant personal affairs. His hope, however, was foredoomed to disappointment. Some chance reference of Sebright to the length of time during which his present travelling companion had been, "in an Indian sense, his next-door neighbour," aroused Brian's curiosity at once.

"Three years!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you've been three years in India, Lyon?"

"Twice three, I believe," Captain Sebright answered, speaking before Lyon had time to open his mouth. "He came out in—'82—wasn't it, Lyon?"

"End of '81. I've had all but seven years of it."

"But what on earth induced you to expatriate

yourself for such a length of time?" inquired Travers in astonishment.

"Beggars can't be choosers—more especially in this era of competitive examinations. I got an offer of work out there; so, naturally, I went."

"Work? But—but surely"— Brian, for once, was at a loss for words.

"You weren't aware I had rejoined the noble army of those who eat their bread in the sweat of their brows? You never heard of the romantic reappearance of my cousin from Australia?"

Brian shook his head. "Never a word."

"Perhaps you didn't even know my late uncle once had a son, who was supposed to have died in North Queensland? Well, he didn't die, after all. It had simply pleased him, for certain private reasons of his own, to disappear for a while. When he heard that I was usurping his patrimony, he very naturally thought it time to reappear, and bid the base intruder forth of his family halls."

"My dear Lyon!" Brian's tone was a mixture of sympathy and indignation. "What a very unpleasant surprise for you! You had no warning?"

"None whatever. I simply got a letter from his solicitors announcing that he was not dead, but very much alive—and in London."

"Still I don't quite understand." Brian knitted his handsome eyebrows in perplexity.

"If there were no proofs of this man's death, how did you ever get possession at all?"

"But there were proofs of his death,—proofs in plenty. It was his interest, as I told you just now, to disappear wholly for a time,—and he had friends who helped him to carry out his plan. Their devotion even went the length of providing certificates to show that he was actually dead and buried. Those certificates were rather a nuisance to him when he wanted to revive," added Lyon. "He had made the proof of his own death so very complete, that he had some trouble in convincing the lawyers of his identity with the man supposed to have been put safely under ground in the bush ten years before. A pity you didn't see the story in the papers,"—turning to Dorothy;—"it really read like a romance. Don't you think a novelist might make something of such materials, Mrs. Travers?"

"If he were a novelist worth his salt, he ought to make a very good three-volume novel out of it," was the answer. "Only, if I were the novelist, I should want to alter the *dénoûment*. In my version, the returning cousin would be no real cousin at all, but a false claimant, whom you should triumphantly unmask." She smiled.

"Thank you," Lyon responded briefly. But there was no answering smile on his lips.

"A much more satisfactory ending to the play," remarked Brian, "to you and to us. I can't tell you how sorry I am, Lyon. You've

no doubt, I suppose, in your own mind, that this cousin *is* a genuine article?"

"None whatever. I never had any—after I had once set eyes upon him, that's to say. For which reason I declined to waste any money or time in defending my perfectly rotten title to his inheritance."

"You gave in without a struggle? At once?"

"I waited to see if he could bring the necessary proofs of his identity first, of course. But I made no attempt to fight his claim. It was too clearly a sound one."

"Well, I hope he behaved considerably himself, in return for your forbearance?"

"Really, there was no forbearance in the matter. It was simply a question of the wrongful possessor giving way to the rightful one, without making a useless (and very expensive) fuss first. I acted out of regard for my own pocket."

"All of which means, I presume, that the gentleman has *not* shown himself considerate?"

"I don't very well see how a perfect stranger can show consideration under such circumstances," returned Lyon brusquely. "Nor yet how one could avail one's self of the consideration, if he did. So long as a man behaves justly and fairly, he does all that can possibly be expected of him, in my opinion."

"Depend upon it," said Brian Travers to his wife, half an hour later, when—their two guests having meantime taken leave—he was free to

comment on Lyon's story in the privacy of Dorothy's little *salon*,—"depend upon it, that curmudgeon of a cousin has made him refund all he spent during his two years of possession."

"Don't you think Mr. Lyon is the kind of man who would have insisted on doing that, in any case?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Old Lyon is proud, of course. But he hates work. And he must have had to work like a black to pay off such a debt, and live at the same time."

"Did he tell you, after I went upstairs, what sort of work he had been doing in the North-West Provinces?" inquired Dorothy, taking a muslin pinafore she was embroidering for Dolly from her work-basket, and beginning to sew upon it.

"Road-making, chiefly, he said. Lately, he's had something to do on the frontier railway, I think. You know he had a lot of experience in Australia, especially with regard to mountain lines; and, though he's not a brilliant engineer, I daresay he makes a very useful underling. Then he has the bump of authority strongly developed; he'd keep his coolies in good order, I've no doubt."

"Does he intend going back to India when his holiday is over?"

"Yes, he's going back; I asked him. But not to the North-West this time. I gathered, from the little he would let out,—it was always like drawing teeth to get Lyon to talk about

himself,—that he has secured a better berth, somewhere in Oudh. I'm glad the old chap is doing so well," Brian said, with a magnificent air of patronage. "It was awfully rough on him, that cousin turning up." He walked to the window and leaned out for a moment; then, turning back into the room, observed tentatively, "I suppose you wouldn't care to come out for a stroll?"

The interrogative note in Mr. Travers' inquiry sounded but faintly. The form of his question showed that he had little or no expectation of obtaining a favourable answer from Dorothy; its tone—to the cynical bystander—might have conveyed the notion that he was not specially eager to obtain one. If he had counted on a negative, he was not disappointed. Nothing could have been more prompt and decided than Dorothy's—

"No, thanks. You know I always like to be within call of the children while Jane is at her supper."

Brian took his hat and stick. "Well, don't wait up for me; I may be a little late. It's really sinful to come in early in such weather. By the way, what do you say to Monte Carlo to-morrow?"

"I don't see how I could be away the whole day." Dorothy spoke in a doubting tone.

"Ah, I expected you would say that!" Brian's tone was quite easy and unruffled. "I must go by myself, then, I suppose;—unless

I find some one inclined to join forces with me. Sebright, perhaps"—thoughtfully. "If I could only feel sure Sebright wouldn't involve Lyon!"

"I thought you liked Mr. Lyon."

"So I do—on appropriate occasions. But one should suit one's company to one's surroundings. At Monte Carlo one feels the need of a companion not above frivolling a little in season. I have it! I might ask Sebright to go with me to-morrow, and engage Lyon for a hill-expedition on Friday or Saturday. That wouldn't be a bad plan, eh?"

"A very good one, I should say," Dorothy answered, a little absently.

CHAPTER III

UNDER THE OLIVES

“ Was wir selbst erwählen, das müssen wir auch selbst durchführen.”

CAPTAIN Sebright proved perfectly willing to bear his quondam schoolfellow company to Monte Carlo ; from which delectable spot he returned in the highest possible spirits, and unable to say enough in praise of the charms of Travers' society. So warm was his eulogium of that pleasant gentleman at breakfast the following morning, that Lyon cynically decided it must have been Brian's advice which had induced his panegyrist to stake his money on the winning number over night.

“ Travers is really a most amusing fellow ”—thus Sebright returned to the charge later on in the reading-room, of which apartment he and his friend chanced to have sole possession for the time. “ So much *verve* and go about him. He was the life of our luncheon-party at the Paris yesterday.”

“ Travers always had a pretty wit,” responded Lyon from behind the open sheets of the *Times*.

"His wit certainly hasn't grown rusty during the past ten years. By Jove! it was good fun to hear him and Mrs. M'Allan together!" Sebright chuckled at the recollection.

"Mrs. —?"

"M'Allan. A very pretty and lively American widow, who sat by him at table, and drew him out—and on—as only a clever Yankee knows how. On second thoughts, though, not a widow—or only a grass one; I'm pretty sure I caught something about a husband in Philadelphia. A fascinating little woman all round. She and Travers seemed to be great allies. By the way, how does his wife strike you?"

"I knew her before." Lyon's tone had a decided curtness—which would have effectually checked a less irrepressible talker than Sebright. Sebright, however, was not easily snubbed into silence.

"Is she an intimate friend of yours?" he asked.

"Mrs. Travers? No." ("That's *not* a lie," Lyon added, in an aside to himself. "I know no one with whom I feel myself more utterly a stranger.")

"Then I suppose I may venture to say she strikes me as hardly the sort of woman one would have expected Travers to have married. And I understand there's little or no money in the case, so his motives can't have been mercenary."

"What kind of woman should you have expected Travers to marry?" inquired Lyon suddenly.

"Well, I should have thought he would have looked out either for beauty, or gifts of some kind. Now Mrs. Travers is barely pretty, and—if you'll excuse my saying so—just a little bit dull."

"Oh, I hold no brief on behalf of Mrs. Travers' looks or intellect, I assure you! So you found her dull? I thought she seemed to have plenty to say for herself at dinner on Wednesday evening."

"She talked 'an infinite deal of nothing'; she never said a single thing worth remembering."

"How many people's 'things' are worth remembering?"

"Mrs. Travers' sole ambition is apparently to say just what would be expected of her on every occasion. What can be more tiresome in a woman?"

"I'll tell you," replied Lyon, carefully turning his newspaper inside out. "A fancy for saying the totally unexpected thing—or trying to say it. A woman with a wild desire after originality is the most exasperating creature breathing. She keeps one's feeble intellect always on the stretch; there is never any knowing at what place she may break out next, and put one to open shame before one's assembled acquaintance. No, no! of the two, give me the conventional woman! At least one knows where one

is with her—and she doesn't get upon one's nerves."

"I give you Mrs. Travers willingly. She doesn't attract me at all." And Captain Sebright returned with a yawn to his novel, happily unconscious of a yearning desire on Lyon's part to knock him backwards out of the French window in the embrasure of which he was lolling comfortably, book in hand.

Lyon saw but little of the Travers during the ensuing week. The hill-excursion, for which Brian had pronounced him a fitting companion, hung fire in an unaccountable manner; Brian excusing himself for putting it off from day to day by vague pleas of "business" and "engagements which took him out of the place." Whither these engagements took him, he did not explicitly reveal; presumably not to Monte Carlo, since he never again renewed his invitation to Sebright to be his fellow-excursionist—somewhat to the chagrin of that ingenuous young rifleman. But whenever Lyon came across him,—whether in the streets of the town, or on the pretty palm-bordered promenade connecting it with the West Bay,—he always appeared to be more or less in a hurry, and his hurry was generally leading him in the direction of the railway station.

These brief chance meetings—and two or three equally brief encounters with Mrs. Travers and her children—apart, nothing occurred to bring Lyon into contact either with Brian or

his wife for the six or seven days following the evening of the little dinner at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. He had, of course, as in duty bound, called upon Dorothy; but she being out at the time of his visit, this had resolved itself into the mere formality of leaving a card for her with the *concierge*. He congratulated himself on having at once recognised the absurdity of the impulse that had urged him to antedate his departure from San Remo when first he became aware of the Travers' presence in the place; to have yielded to it would have been to proclaim himself indeed one of those fools who can be frightened by a shadow. As things had turned out, he had seen next to nothing of Mrs. Travers; and all he had seen had only contributed to his growing disillusionment concerning her.

At the end of ten days Brian's engagements finally permitted him to fix a date for the long-deferred expedition to Baiardo. The following morning was the time chosen by himself, and agreed to by Lyon; and it was further settled between the two that—the Hôtel d'Angleterre being on their outward line of route—Lyon, whose hotel was situated in the town, should call for his companion.

Great, therefore, was his surprise and indignation, when, having climbed the long flights of steps that form the approach to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, and presented himself, at the appointed hour of ten, within its great glass doors,

he was informed that Brian had left it an hour before, having—so the *concierge* positively asserted—gone down to the station in the hotel omnibus, intending to take the nine o'clock train.

Lyon's expression, on receipt of this information, became decidedly forbidding. Some instinct to which he gave no name—a fair-minded outsider might have called it an instinct of generosity—had prompted him to an endeavour to think as well as he could of Brian Travers, and to be specially watchful against any tendency to over-sensitiveness where that young man's conduct was concerned. But Brian's present behaviour struck him—even from the severely impartial standpoint from which he forced himself to regard it—as a trifle cavalier.

“Mr. Travers left no message for me?”

In so far as the *concierge* was aware—none. But it was possible that madame— Perhaps monsieur would like to see Madame Travers?

Lyon only hesitated a second before replying in the affirmative. Then a waiter was sent upstairs, and returned with the information that Mrs. Travers was in the garden. Would monsieur go to her there? Yes, he would.

As Lyon threaded his way along the narrow shingly paths, between the rows of orange and lemon trees, in the wake of the diminutive Italian *garçon* with his shock of well-oiled black hair and ill-fitting black coat grown shiny at the shoulders with long use, he was irresistibly

reminded of the autumn afternoon, now nearly nine years since, when, amidst very different surroundings, and in a strangely different mood, he had gone out into the garden of The Haulms in search of Dorothy Temple. As far as his own feelings were concerned, not nine years only, but ninety, might have elapsed since that November day ; so unreal, so like the recollections of a vivid dream, or of something that had happened in another state of existence, did his reminiscences—all clear-cut and unfaded though they yet were—appear, as he viewed them afresh in the light of present circumstance.

Curiously enough, his first sight of Dorothy—when at last he came within sight of her, she had crossed the boundaries of the garden proper into the olive-grove beyond it, and had there established herself under a tree, book in hand, a work-basket beside her—did much to dispel this sense of unreality, and to give a new life to his de-vitalised memories. For the first time since his meeting with her a fortnight ago, she reminded him forcibly of her old self. Perhaps it was the absence of the children which led to this thought—or fancy—on his part ; or it may have been induced by the fact that she was more plainly dressed, her hair arranged with less of elaborate care than usual, and that her appearance had thus regained something of its former air of simplicity. Certainly much of the quick impetuosity of her girlish days was in her manner as, on perceiving him, she sprang up

and came forward, not waiting for the servant's announcement.

"You didn't get my note, then? Oh, I am so sorry! Brian had no time to write; he was obliged to hurry off, directly the post came in, almost without his breakfast. But I wrote at once, and sent down the note by nurse and the children. I'm afraid Jane has loitered on the way—perhaps the shops were too much for her, poor thing! But it's most annoying that you should have had your climb up here for nothing!"

"Pray don't trouble yourself to be annoyed; it's of no consequence, for I had nothing else to do," Lyon returned magnanimously. Then the two shook hands, and Mrs. Travers said, with an embarrassed glance on either side of her—

"I wish I could ask you to sit down; but"—

"I see you have no chair to offer me," put in her visitor coolly, to the relief of her embarrassment. "Never mind. I'll take the terrace instead, if you'll allow me, for a minute or two. Mother Earth affords a very safe seat in these regions," he added, proceeding to carry out his proposition—"even for a rheumatically inclined individual, like myself."

"Excuse me, but—you hardly look the character," Dorothy said, with a pretty, civil smile, for which Lyon felt inclined to hate her.

"My looks belie me then—in that matter."

"Then it *was* on account of health that you

came here, after all?" Dorothy's smile had faded, and she spoke with her old sudden directness of interrogation.

"Partly."

"You have been ill, then?"

"Oh, I had a sharp touch of rheumatic fever last rainy season. That's all."

"And more than enough"—relapsing into the smile once more. "You certainly ought to be very careful for some time to come."

"I am, I assure you. Being laid by the heels for four months on end isn't so charming an experience that I should care to provoke a repetition of it. (Why on earth do I tell her all this?" Lyon asked himself, with secret self-contempt. "My misfortunes can't possibly interest her; and I've no right to wish that they should.) So Travers has been called away suddenly? No bad news, I hope?"

"Oh no! only some business matter. He had to go over to Savona for the day."

"Rather hard on him—in the midst of his holiday."

"Very hard, I think. He asked me to tell you how sorry he was to have to put off Baiardo once more. There seems a fate against that expedition coming off."

"There does. All the more reason why we should insist on carrying out the plan. I don't approve of giving way to destiny."

"Perhaps you don't believe in destiny?"

"Oh yes, I do! I should be a stiff-necked

infidel indeed, if I didn't. Destiny has beaten me so often that I was long ago forced to believe in her—and to respect her, too. But it's always well to fight her as long as one can. How's my young friend Robin?"

"He's very well, thank you; and so is Dolly. They will soon be home from their walk, if you— But I forgot!" Dorothy interrupted herself. "You don't like children."

"I never said so, Mrs. Travers."

"Something very like it, Mr. Lyon."

"I beg your pardon! I said I didn't *understand* children—quite a different thing. Understanding and liking are not synonymous terms, believe me. Some of the grown people I like best have always remained more or less of a sealed book to my understanding. And in other cases—where I have succeeded in breaking the seals—I am sorry to say 'better knowledge' has not by any means invariably conduced to 'dearer love.' Again armed with a book, I see!"—abruptly changing the subject, after a scarcely perceptible pause. "You seem to have become a great reader."

"I was always fond of reading," Dorothy said. "But I didn't always prefer it to every other occupation."

"And now—you do?"

"Decidedly. There is nothing in the world—at least, so I find as I get older—that takes one so completely and satisfactorily out of one's self."

There was a momentary flash of intelligence and sympathy—or was it satisfaction?—in Lyon's eyes. Then he dropped his eyelids in the old fashion, and observed lazily—

"It's always an advantage to get rid of one's own company, even for an hour or two. But you must be singularly fortunate in your choice of books, if you often find one that will do so much for you. I think I shall beg the favour of a copy of your old library lists! May I ask what you are engaged upon just now?"

She handed him the volume she had been reading when he came; a copy of *Amiel's Journal*, in the original French.

Lyon frowned thoughtfully at the title-page.

"Do you care greatly for this book?" he inquired, with one of his startling direct looks straight into her face.

"I can hardly tell you, as yet. I only began it this morning; I don't suppose I have read much more than a dozen pages"—

"Would you think me very impertinent if I advised you to stop short here—not to go beyond the dozen pages?"

"Not at all. But why—?" with a touch of hesitation.

"For this reason. You'll not be any the happier for reading what follows."

"Is the book so—harmful, then?"

"Not in the ordinary acceptance of the term. It doesn't inculcate immoral doctrines, that's to say—unless the doctrine that nothing

in life is worth while may be considered immoral."

"What do *you* think?" Dorothy asked.

"I? I'm no authority. No man is fit to pronounce on the morality of a principle he holds himself,—especially if he in any sort acts up to it. But this I will say: knowing the fruits of that faith by experience, I don't wish to see it making fresh converts among my friends. One may believe a creed to be perfectly sound—and yet be quite without desire to propagate it."

"I see," replied Dorothy, putting Amiel aside, and taking a small half-knitted sock from her work-basket. "I see also," she added, after a minute, when she had brought her needles into play, "that you still retain your old fancy for painting yourself and your opinions as black as possible. In that respect you have not changed at all."

"However much in others?" Lyon put in, as she stopped short, becoming suddenly conscious that her half-completed phrase was susceptible of an uncivil interpretation. "Ah!" he went on, with a lightness that did honour to his powers of dissimulation, seeing that never in his life had he felt less inclined for levity than at that moment; "Travers was a little too hasty with his compliments the other day at San Lorenzo! Poor fellow! I saw it was a dreadful shock to him, the first time he beheld my uncovered head. Nothing like a hat—especially

a straw hat"—touching the article in question, which he was carefully balancing on his knee—"for giving one a spurious appearance of juvenility!"

"The Indian climate"—Mrs. Travers suggested.

"Thanks. It's very nice of you to put it in that way." Lyon drew his hand through his half-grizzled locks—the top of his head was certainly getting very grey—with a mock sigh. "The Indian climate is doubtless chiefly responsible for the transformation. And then, I believe mine is the kind of hair that always 'turns early'—at least, I am in the habit of laying that flattering unction to the soul of my wounded vanity. Hark! don't I hear your young people's voices? That is surely Master Robin's pipe"—

Dorothy's knitting-needles dropped into her lap; with them went her company manner, her conventional smile. Her whole face changed, brightened, became gradually illuminated with a radiancy of expectation. "How she worships these children!" thought the man watching her, with a throb of unreasoning jealousy.

She had not long to wait and listen. A moment, and Robin burst—as it appeared—out of the heart of a clump of oranges, flew up the steep bank to his mother's side, and began to pant out—

"Oh, mother, will you please come"—

"Gently, sonnie!" Dorothy interrupted him.

"Don't you see Mr. Lyon? Say how do you do to him before you tell me anything. And, Robin dear, you should try to remember that the padrone does not like you to rush about among his orange trees in that wild way."

"I'm very sorry, mummy dear—I forgot. How do you do, Mr. Lyon?" And Robin, having hastily extended a small hot hand to the visitor, returned once more to his mother's side. "May I tell now, mother?"

"Yes, boy, certainly."

"Well, you know you gave me some money to spend at Naldi's. But we met a little beggar girl,—quite in rags, and without any shoes, and she said her mother was blind,—and Dolly hadn't any money, of course, and Jane hadn't any, either—and I was so sorry for her, so I gave her all my *soldi*"—

"That was quite right, dear," Dorothy said encouragingly, as the young narrator paused for want of breath.

"But we've been talking to Carlo, the porter, since we came in, and we told him about the little girl, and he says he knows her quite well, and she isn't a nice little girl at all, and her mother isn't blind a bit! And I want my *soldi* back, and Jane won't ask the little girl for them. Won't you come and ask her for them, mummy dear? She's only out in the road, just at the bottom of the steps. Do come, please!"

Dorothy's face had grown grave. "No, Robin, I can't ask for your *soldi*. Nobody

ought ever to ask for things back they have once given away. It would not be right—and it would be very unkind to this poor little girl”—

“But Carlo says she is a very naughty little girl!”

“All the more reason why you should try to help her, perhaps.”

This was much too profound philosophy for Robin, who stood for a moment silent, leaning on the back of his mother's chair, and swinging one foot to and fro, with a puzzled expression of countenance. Then he burst out hotly—

“It was all Dolly's fault—she wanted me to give my pennies to the little girl. I wish I'd kept them, and bought those lead soldiers in Naldi's window. I only gave up because I thought her mother was blind. They're *lovely* soldiers. Or I might have got a new knife.”

“If I were you,” Mr. Lyon remarked, “I'd try to put soldiers and knives out of my head—till I had some more *soldi*.”

“But why can't I have those *soldi* back?” Robin demanded, with passion. “I *want* them back. Mummy, do come and speak to the little girl, and make her give me my money, please!”

“No, Robin; certainly not.” Dorothy's tone was almost severe. She had flushed deeply during the last minute or two; she looked both annoyed and distressed. “I should not think of doing such a thing. It was your own choice giving this money away; you know I never ask

you to give your money to poor people. But it's a very shameful thing to give money, and then want to take it back again. Let me hear no more of this. Run away to Jane,—I see her in the garden with Dolly,—and don't talk any more about it."

"Poor little chap!" ejaculated Lyon compassionately, as the boy went slowly and sulkily down the incline he had run up so eagerly a few minutes earlier.

"He is a very impulsive child," she responded—and there was an undertone of sadness in her voice. "And his impulses are mostly generous. Only, unfortunately, as you see, they don't last."

"You can't expect seven years old to reckon the cost of its sacrifices very accurately beforehand. For the matter of that, older people than my friend Robin have been known to sacrifice their lead soldiers to the calls of benevolence in a fit of short-lived enthusiasm—and then clamour to have them back again. Personally, I believe there's nothing mankind is so prone to regret as its virtuous actions. Especially when they fail to bear any ostensible fruit."

"I daresay you are right," Dorothy answered, in a rather subdued voice.

Something in her fashion of uttering the commonplace phrase caused Lyon to glance at her, swiftly, from under his eyelashes. Was she convinced that *her* sacrifice had been a fruitless one? had she arrived at the point of acknowledging the correctness of those predic-

tions of failure with which he had threatened her in Guernsey nine years before? Her face gave him no clear and unmistakable answer to these questions. But, like her tone, it sent a sudden pang of suspicion into his soul; it pierced him with a sharp doubt of his first hasty judgment. What if this woman's serenity were, in truth, quite artificial? or, at best, merely skin-deep? What if all Dorothy Temple's old capacity for feeling and suffering lay—not by any means extinguished, but simply hidden away under the Parisian gowns and smooth, self-possessed manners of Mrs. Brian Travers? The idea was one which he felt it unwise to pursue under his companion's eye. He returned, with an effort, to the subject of Robin.

"Now, I should like to know, as a matter of curiosity," he said interrogatively, "whether you would consider it an immoral proceeding to replace those *soldi*? or devise some other means by which your son might have his lead soldiers in spite of all?"

Dorothy laughed. "I should call it misleading rather than immoral."

"And how misleading?"

"Isn't it to mislead a child, to let him think he can go back upon his actions? or wipe out their consequences, as he would wipe out a figure on his slate?"

"I had no idea"—Lyon's tone was slightly sarcastic—"that your philosophy of life was of so stern a character."

"Do you believe in the wiping-out process, then?" inquired Dorothy, with her prettiest—and least expressive—smile.

"No, I don't," replied Lyon bluntly, with a touch of irritation in his manner—getting up and putting on his hat as he spoke. "On the contrary, I believe that, once set down a wrong figure in your sum, it remains a factor of the sum to the end of time. You may introduce other modifying factors—you may add to the figure, or subtract from it—but you'll never succeed in wholly neutralising it, and its effect will always appear in your final result. Oh, I don't for a moment impugn the correctness of your theory. If there's one truth experience establishes before all others, it is this—that every man must bear the burden of his own mistakes. Only it seems to me—if you'll excuse my saying so—a little early to begin impressing that sort of truth upon your son."

"Don't the copy-books tell us that 'Truth cannot be learnt too early'?" gaily retorted Dorothy. "Are you going?" for her visitor was holding out a sunburnt hand. "Shall you attempt Baiardo alone?"

"No; I think I shall give up Baiardo for to-day, and content myself with something less ambitious by way of a walk—something within Sebright's marching powers. That is to say, if I get back to the hotel in time to catch him before he goes off on some expedition of his own devising."

CHAPTER IV

IN A DESERTED GARDEN

*"They told me she was sad that day,
(Though wherefore tell what love's sooth say
Sooner than they did register?)
And my heart leapt and wept to her—
And yet I did not speak nor stir."*

LYON did not succeed in his attempt to "catch" Captain Sebright. When he got back to his own hotel, it was to find his friend flown to Monte Carlo; from which alluring scene of dissipation the young man returned only towards dinner-time—with an empty purse and a torturing headache.

"Serves you right," growled Lyon unfeelingly, when he had shut the *persiennes* of their common sitting-room, and supplied his suffering companion—who had thrown himself down miserably on the one sofa adorning that modest apartment—with a sufficiency of pillows. "How could you be such a madman as to expose that head of yours to this glaring sun?—to say nothing of the abominable heat of those stifling rooms. You may think yourself

precious lucky if you haven't got a fresh stroke. At best, you are bound to have stirred up all the old mischief."

"Don't be too down on a fellow. I *was* a fool for going, I know. I knew it before I'd spent an hour in the confounded place. But one doesn't like to own one's self so easily beaten ; it's humiliating," said Sebright, closing his eyes with a stifled groan.

"So you held on till you couldn't stand any longer, I suppose?"

"Well, I was pretty bad before I beat a retreat. I was so blind and dizzy I couldn't walk straight. I'm certain the officials at the Casino thought I was drunk, and were in two minds about arresting me, and I hardly know how I should have got away at all, but for Brian Travers."

"Brian Travers?" ejaculated Lyon. "Was *he* at Monte Carlo to-day?"

"Luckily for me—yes. What a good-natured fellow it is! He even forsook his American charmer—by the way, there's a lively flirtation going on in that quarter; I advise your friend Mrs. Travers to keep her eye on the volatile Brian—he actually left his lady temporarily in the lurch to see me safely into my train. By the way I got to Ventimiglia"—

"Was Travers playing?" asked Lyon, interrupting Sebright's narrative without ceremony.

"I saw him staking a few five-franc pieces early in the day—no more. He seemed too

much absorbed in the other game to take any serious interest in roulette. She's an uncommonly pretty woman, let me tell you, that Mrs. M'Allan. Don't know when I've seen such colouring. By the way, didn't Travers give you the slip to-day? Weren't you to have done a tramp together?"

"Yes, to Baiardo. I understood he had been called to Savona on business," returned Lyon, whose countenance had gathered considerable blackness while Sebright was speaking.

"So, apparently, did his wife." Sebright laughed a little faintly. "I'm afraid Master Brian is not so straightforward as he might be. All the same, I am sorry my incautious remarks should be the means of involving him in domestic unpleasantness—as will be the case, I fear. And yet I put my foot in it so innocently! I honestly thought to make myself agreeable to the lady by dilating on her lord's good nature."

"You met Mrs. Travers just now?" Lyon interrupted again.

"On my way up here from the station, worse luck!"

"And you told her you had met Travers at Monte Carlo? What a blockhead you are, Sebright!"

Sebright looked considerably surprised—and a trifle offended—by this outspoken expression of opinion on his companion's part. "No doubt," he returned rather drily. "Still, a

wiser man—you yourself even—might, under the same circumstances, have committed the same blunder. How the dickens was I to guess that Travers had been giving his wife a false address for this particular afternoon? I repeat that I'm sorry to have been the means of getting him into trouble. No doubt Mrs. Travers will have an effective scene ready rehearsed for his return to-night; but, if you consider the matter impartially, he really has only himself to blame in the matter. Men shouldn't tell lies—especially to their wives—unless they want to be found out, sooner or later. That's all I have to say," concluded Sebright, closing his eyes once more with an injured air.

He need not have regretted his involuntary betrayal of Brian even thus much—at least as far as that gentleman himself was concerned. No "scene" awaited Mr. Travers on his return to the domestic hearth; indeed, several days elapsed before Dorothy made any allusion at all to the revelation which Sebright's fluent gratitude had been the means of making to her. Perhaps she remained silent in the hope that her husband might involuntarily confess the truth, and so spare her the humiliation of accusing him; perhaps—the situation being one with which she was already unhappily familiar—it was sheer despairing disgust that forbade her to utter either an inquiry or a reproach. Strictly as she had trained herself, for

some years past, not only to suppress every outward sign of strong feeling, but to strangle every secret movement towards it,—steadily as she had forced herself to live upon the surface of things, scarcely ever venturing out of the safe shallows of an artificial existence into the deep, dangerous sea of genuine thought and emotion,—there were, even now, moments when the old nature within her would persist in re-asserting itself in fierce indignation, passionate discontent, and a sickening sense of unendurable shame.

Possibly she might never have referred to the deception practised upon her at all, had not Brian himself provoked her to the reference. But when he spoke vaguely, one evening after dinner, of a call that would take him away from San Remo on the morrow, it was hardly in human nature—certainly not in feminine and wifely human nature—to refrain from the obvious retort—

“To Monte Carlo, I suppose?”

She spoke very quietly—albeit conscious of a horrible tightening of her throat as she forced out the words.

Brian gave a slight, irrepressible start. “Well, yes, it’s to Monte Carlo I—thought of going. But why did you jump to that conclusion?”

Before she could reply to the question, he realised that he had been a fool for putting it. He realised the painful truth even more fully when her reply came, measured and deliberate.

"Probably because I was informed that you were there last Wednesday, when I believed you to be at Savona." Up to this moment Dorothy had continued to draw her needle in and out of the work in her hand; now she laid both down upon her knee, and turned her face—which was a good deal paler than usual—towards her husband. "I can't quite make out, Brian, why you should have wished to deceive me in this matter. And I think—if you reflect a little—you'll recognise that it's hardly seemly outsiders should learn that you keep me purposely in the dark as to your movements."

"I am sure I don't know why I didn't tell you I might perhaps go to Monte Carlo instead of Savona on Wednesday," responded Brian—speaking even more quickly than usual, to cover his embarrassment. "I suppose because I fancied you would take it into your head that I went to Monte Carlo to gamble, which is not the case. I don't care a brass farthing for play; I've never staked more than a napoleon or two at the tables in my life. I run over to the place simply because it's bright and amusing, and a place where one feels certain of meeting people one knows. It's not my fault that I go there alone. I should be only too glad to take you with me. But you are always tied hand and foot to the children."

"You would not like me to neglect the children?" Dorothy was conscious of defending herself feebly. But this sudden turning of the

tables upon her by her husband had, metaphorically speaking, taken away her breath.

"Certainly not. I merely protest against your devoting your whole time and thoughts to them. A man naturally looks for a little of his wife's society—even when she happens to have two children."

Dorothy bent her head once more over her work, saying nothing. She was no fool. If not a clever woman, she was at least a clear-sighted one; she had never felt for her husband that overwhelming love which can blind the most intense keenness of insight; and eight years of married life had furnished her with abundant proofs that his ease and pleasure-loving nature would stoop to any ignoble shift or sham with the utmost readiness, rather than face even the passing breath of a domestic storm: therefore she knew in her heart that Brian's main object in his counter-complaint was to create a diversion in his own favour, and that he was not in reality so anxious for her company as he affected to be for the moment. At the same time, her conscience—very tender where he was concerned—would not allow her to dispute altogether the justice of his grievance. It was true that, while still loyally endeavouring to make his home pleasant to him, she had, of late years, gradually excused herself more and more, on the plea of the children's need of her, from accompanying him in any pleasure-seeking expedition

outside it. Had she failed in her duty in so doing?

She turned the question over in her mind for the next two hours. Lonely hours they were, for Brian—finding, to his great relief, that she had no apparent intention of pursuing the subject previously in hand—presently took himself off for the remainder of the evening to the smoking-room, bearing with him the comfortable consciousness of having had the last word. When he came upstairs again, towards midnight, he was surprised to find her still sitting at work in the same place.

“Yes, I waited on purpose; I wanted to speak to you,” was her rejoinder to his half-uttered exclamation of astonishment. She began rolling up her embroidery as she spoke, and her manner showed a mixture of nervousness and determination. “I have been thinking over what you said just after dinner.”

“Oh! Well, I hope you see now that I didn’t speak quite without reason,” responded Brian, judging that he would probably do wisely to maintain the *rôle* of the injured party a little longer.

The undertone of unreality which, to her ear, was audible in this speech, jarred upon Dorothy, but she managed by an effort to control her irritation.

“I believe you are right in saying that I give up too much time to the children,” she resumed steadily. “I am afraid I have seemed incon-

siderate for you—and I am sorry. For the future you'll find me ready to do differently. I will consider your convenience more, and go about with you as much as you please."

"That will be famous!" Brian responded. He strove to speak with the utmost heartiness; but he could not quite keep down a note of uneasiness in his voice. "It will be quite like old times, won't it? And some gadding would do you good; it's a shame you should waste all your pretty looks and pretty frocks on an admiring audience of one—though you'll get no more sincere admirer out of doors," giving her shoulder a caressing pat. "I wish I could ask you to begin turning over the new leaf to-morrow; but I suppose that would hardly do, as the party is to be such a small one, and you don't know the people yet."

"Who are the people?" inquired Dorothy, gently releasing her shoulder from her husband's hand.

"Oh, those Americans I've often talked to you about!—don't you remember? Their name's Warrener—most amusing people. Strictly speaking, this dinner is given by Mrs. M'Allan, Mrs. Warrener's sister—but they're all travelling together, as one party. I must introduce you to them at the earliest opportunity; I know you'd like them immensely. And Mrs. M'Allan was saying, only the other day, how much she wished to make your acquaintance."

Nevertheless, Mrs. M'Allan did not send

Dorothy any invitation by her husband the following night ; and, though Brian made several further flying excursions to Monte Carlo in the course of the next ten days, he continued to make them alone. Sometimes he told his wife where he was going, sometimes he did not—according to circumstances—and the new leaf remained unturned.

Lyon, meeting Mrs. Travers from time to time in the streets of the town, or on the Berigo road, and noting the look of anxiety that was becoming habitual to her eyes, the hardening of all the lines of her mouth, when, in answer to his easy—"Brian's off for the day, I think?" she would reply briefly, "Yes, he has gone over to Monte Carlo,"—wondered whether any hint of the gossip current in San Remo concerning Brian's growing infatuation for the fascinating American "grass-widow" could have reached her ears? It might be that some officious female friend had held it her duty to report the flying rumours to Brian's wife; it might be that her own clear-sightedness had, unassisted, given her insight into the true character of the attraction which drew her husband so often across the French frontier. That she had some inkling of the actual state of affairs, Lyon felt convinced.

The limit originally fixed for his stay in San Remo was now close at hand, and he found himself, somewhat to his disgust, regretting the fact. He was conscious of an ignoble longing to linger on a little while—if only in order to witness

the further development of the domestic drama which had excited his interest. He recognised the existence of this his discreditable desire, and, with his usual cynical frankness, made full acknowledgment of its unworthiness to himself ; but he did not carry his cynicism so far as to propose to yield to it. When Sebright observed interrogatively, "I suppose you'll be ready to move on Thursday?" he assented with apparent nonchalance. And if he did not join with any particular animation in the discussion which his companion subsequently initiated, on the comparative merits of the various stopping-places at which they might conveniently halt on their homeward journey, he at least allowed Sebright to thrash the subject out without interrupting him.

It having been finally agreed that the pair should travel straight through to Paris, and put up there for the next ten days, Sebright, who was getting eager to remove to an atmosphere more lively than that of San Remo, and felt it prudent to strike while the iron was hot—for he had anticipated some objection on Lyon's part to his Parisian plan, and feared that, were that gentleman left to reflect upon it for any length of time, he might even now back out of his acquiescence—offered to write at once and engage rooms ; and Lyon accepted his offer. Then he lighted a cigar, strolled out of the hotel garden, filled with a laughing, chattering, flirting crowd,—for it was the hour after dinner,

and so mild a night that scarce a soul had remained within doors,—and, taking a rough path that led upward through an olive plantation, presently emerged upon the Berigo road. There he turned his face westwards, following the road in its windings round the face of the hill downwards to the sea.

For some time he tramped steadily on, encountering no living soul by the way. Now and then he would pass a white villa with closed *persiennes* showing black in the moonlight—for the moon was in its first quarter, and shed a steady flood of illumination on his surroundings; or the palisades of a garden, screened for the most part from sight by graceful pepper-trees or drooping boughs of the eucalyptus, but within which he would perhaps catch a passing glimpse of some young active figure flitting ghostlike among the orange and lemon bushes, while a child's voice would ring out momentarily on the quiet air. But at length even these evidences of human life were left behind, and the way lay between close-serried ranks of olives and pines on the one hand, and a deep, lonely, and thickly wooded ravine on the other. To the extreme right, beyond and far above the ravine, rose a long hog-backed hill, tree-clothed from base to summit, crowned by a little group of twinkling lights marking the tiny hill town of Colla; in front, some hundreds of feet below, the moonbeams shimmered on the pale purple expanse of the Mediterranean. A great calm was over

sea and land; not a ripple stirred on the placid waters, not a leaf rustled in the silent woods—which perfumed all the quiet air with a subtle bouquet of spring odours, a compound fragrance to which pine, violet, narcissus, and a score of other sweet and pungent-smelling things had all contributed ingredients.

Presently a new, delicious scent, at once more overpoweringly sweet and less complex in its sweetness than the subtle essence of spring which had accompanied him for half a mile, assailed Lyon's nostrils—assailed them so strongly that he stopped and looked about him curiously to see whence it came. His curiosity was quickly gratified. He had, a moment before, come abreast of a lonely, unoccupied villa, perched, far away from all its fellows, on the left of the road; a small, low-roofed, one-storied building, scarcely bigger than a cottage, covered with flowering creepers, and surrounded by a garden of some size—it was from this garden that the scent (which he now recognised as the scent of heliotrope) was proceeding. He remembered having noticed, in some previous daylight walk past the place, that heliotrope grew in its neglected flower-beds like a weed.

“Pity so much sweetness should waste itself wholly on the desert air!” he thought to himself. “I have more than half a mind to a little petty larceny.”

He pushed the already half-open gate a little farther back on its rusty hinges, and went in.

The heliotrope was everywhere; clothing the posts of the verandah which ran round two sides of the house, and straggling over its roof, looking in at the French windows of the ground floor rooms, lying across the weed-grown paths, half-choking the rose bushes which filled the borders—a wealth of unclaimed sweetness most alluring to the predatory instinct of the passer-by. Lyon, though he professed to care but little for flowers, felt his predatory instinct so strongly aroused by the sight that without hesitation he put out his hand to take of the profusion surrounding him. But he very quickly drew it back again, empty of spoil. Like the hero of a moral story-book, he perceived that his intended crime would not go unwitnessed.

Sitting under the verandah, a child at her feet, was a woman—presumably the wife of the caretaker or proprietor of the villa. Lyon, made fearful by an accusing conscience, and anxious to disarm suspicion, hastily summoned his scanty stock of Italian to his aid, and, politely lifting his hat to the lady, wished her good-evening—adding a would-be careless remark on the fineness of the night.

For answer, a familiar little figure in a white sun-bonnet jumped up and ran towards him, crying, “Mr. Lyon! Mr. Lyon!”—and Dorothy Travers rose to her feet under the verandah, saying, “How do you do? You see, we are trespassing, like yourself.”

Shaking off, as well as he could, all signs of

the somewhat unreasonable amazement he felt at her sudden apparition, he went forward and shook hands with her. Her hand felt strangely cold; her face was very pale, and wore a look of intense weariness. But she made shift to summon her usual smile as she observed, "Isn't this a charming wilderness?"

"Most charming. I doubt, though, if you are wise in enjoying its charms at such a late hour. If you sit here much longer, you will probably take a chill—always supposing you have not taken one already."

"Oh, I never take chills!" was Dorothy's confident answer. "I am immensely strong."

"H'm!—you don't look so strikingly robust at this moment. Indeed, if you were any one else, I should say you looked ill. But since your absolute hardiness is an article of faith with you, I suppose I mustn't venture that."

"I am not ill, truly!" Dorothy interposed earnestly. "I confess, though, that I am tired, very tired." She sank down into her former seat as though she were, indeed, too weary to stand a single moment longer. "A party of people from Monte Carlo—some friends of my husband's—have been spending the day with us, and of course I had to show them all the lions—and it was so hot! I own I felt a good deal inclined to collapse before the day was over."

Lyon guessed what had happened. Brian's American charmer—moved, perhaps, by a not unnatural curiosity concerning the personality

of the woman she was doing her best to rob ; perhaps by a baser desire to triumph over the wife by exhibiting to her her rightful property yoked to her rival's conquering car—had expressed a sudden fancy to spend a day at San Remo in Mrs. Travers' company ; and Brian had been too weak or too infatuated to resist her caprice. Thence, as a natural result, long hours of galling humiliation for Dorothy, and of bold assertion of her empire on Mrs. M'Allan's part. Lyon had heard enough, during the past fortnight, from various impartial witnesses touching Mrs. M'Allan,—a lady whose main ambition seemed to be, not so much the actual acquisition of power over the stronger sex, as the display of this power, when gained, to an admiring world,—to credit her with any amount of audacity and cruelty in such circumstances. The estimate he had formed of her on report had been a decidedly unfavourable one ; the mere fact of her visit to Travers' wife confirmed him in his unflattering opinion. As to his present estimate of Brian Travers—well, it was one he would have found it difficult to express in polite language.

No one, however, could have suspected that he had divined a painful secret behind Dorothy's commonplace words, or that every fibre of his body was tingling with a passion of indignation, as he rejoined, in the coolest and most indifferent manner possible—

“Lionising strangers is galley-slaves' work ; I know nothing so exhausting. Never, while I

live, shall I forget an experience I enjoyed as showman in Benares. A distant cousin of mine, gifted with a herculean physique and an inquiring intellect, came to visit me. He was twenty-five years old ; he had read an immense number of books on the history of India ; he had studied Oriental archæology ; he took an interest in irrigation works : and he wanted to know why about everything he saw. He was all but the death of me—but then he stayed a fortnight. You are less severely tried—I conclude your visitors have already departed ?”

“Yes. They left by the eight o'clock train.” Dorothy, who, for the last moment or two, had been pulling at a loose spray of heliotrope which hung down from the roof of the verandah, here broke the spray off and crushed it in her hand. “How sweet this smells, doesn't it ?” she said, abruptly leaving the subject of her visitors.

“It was the scent that drew me inside the gate—with half-formed intentions of plunder,” Lyon confessed. “Do you want a bit ?”—to Dolly, who, reseated at her mother's feet, was putting up imploring fat hands for the treasure just visible between Dorothy's fingers. “Here you are, then !” breaking off a cluster the size of a small branch, and dropping it into the child's lap. “Don't disturb yourself,”—to Dorothy, who had made an involuntary movement of remonstrance. “No moral harm done, I assure you. At that age, one isn't troubled with ideas

about the rights of property. What delicious stuff it is!"—recklessly pulling down another cluster. "The only pleasant thing I can remember in that God-forsaken place Creyke, was the climbing heliotrope in the conservatory. The house and gardens were capable of improvement, though. I hear John Lewin has improved them out of all knowledge."

"Will he carry on your improvements? the reforms you had set on foot in the village?"

"It would be more correct if you were to say the reforms I vainly attempted to set on foot! No, I hardly think my cousin will be likely to repeat my mistakes; he is too practical a man. I am told that he expressed unqualified disapproval from the first of my cottage-building scheme."

"That must have made it hard to yield your place to him—for you had grown interested in your miners, hadn't you?" Dorothy spoke with a touch of genuine eagerness.

"Yes," Lyon admitted reluctantly; "I must confess that, once we were engaged in a stand-up fight, I began to feel a certain interest in those chaps—they fought so pluckily. And then my credit was concerned in the matter; one doesn't like being beaten by one's own *employés*. So, the more bent they showed themselves on taking their own way, the more anxious I became to persuade them to go mine. I fancy obstinacy survives all other vices—in the majority of mankind."

"I believe," Dorothy said, after a moment, ignoring the half-contemptuous self-criticism of her companion's concluding sentence,—“I believe I have never yet said how sorry I was to—to find you”—

"Playing the part of the *Disinherited*? Thanks—though I don't know that there's much to be sorry for. It's generally agreed—isn't it?—that a man is really the better off for having to work for his living. Not that I profess any enthusiastic personal faith in the doctrine," Lyon added. "Personally, I hate work—the work I live by, that's to say?"

"And that is—?"

"Engineering, of course. I know no other trade."

"And your other work? You spoke as if there were some other—which you did *not* hate?"

"Merely play-work, so far—whether it ever takes on a more serious complexion remains yet to be seen. More cherry-pie, Miss Dolly? All the first helping gone already? Well, here you are again; but try to be moderate—we must leave something for the poor proprietor, I suppose."

"But this play-work of yours, as you call it?" Dorothy seemed to have been suddenly attacked by a severe fit of curiosity. "Perhaps, though," she added quickly, "I ought not to ask—I beg your pardon."

"Pray don't! The thing is not of such importance that I should make any mystery about

it," responded Lyon—with a shade of annoyance in his tone, nevertheless. "I've merely taken it into my head to add one more to the heap of would-be instructive tomes under which the reading world is already groaning. If ever I can find time to write it, that's to say."

"A book on India?"

"Oh, of course! Every man who goes to India makes some highly important and perfectly novel discovery in relation to that remarkable country; generally, within six months of landing at Bombay, he has formulated an able and ingenious theory for its government on quite new and original lines. I am no better than my fellows. I have made my discovery, and formulated my theory—and now I thirst to lay my exposition of both before an intelligent British public," Lyon concluded, with a queer little smile.

Again Dorothy ignored his note of self-mockery. "I believe you are heartily in earnest about the writing of this book," was her grave answering remark—uttered in a tone which seemed to rebuke and challenge him at once.

He replied to the challenge with complete frankness. "Strange to say, I believe I am. I caught myself, only yesterday,—to my own profound astonishment,—formulating a wish that I might live to finish it."

"Why, have you any fear—any expectation?"—

Lyon struck in deftly—"Of quitting this mortal scene at an early date? By no means. But,

seeing that I can only afford to write in play-hours,—there being at present no very keen competition between the principal publishing-houses for the honour of bringing out this great work when completed,—it's likely to be a good while on the stocks, you perceive."

"That is a pity."

"Ah, I don't know! The pleasure of writing it is prolonged for me—and the pain of trying to read it is deferred for the public—not a bad arrangement, on the whole."

"How long has it been on the stocks already?"

"A matter of three or four years."

"And when you go back to India—I suppose the book is the great argument for your going back at all, isn't it?"

"Hardly. I've got together all the material I know how to make use of; I could easily finish putting it into shape over here—supposing that I were at the same time sure of getting bread and cheese. But in Europe I should be pretty sure of *not* getting them, so I can't stay in Europe. Not that I particularly want to stay. In many ways, India isn't at all a bad country to live in."

There was a moment's silence. Dorothy thoughtfully caressed Dolly's yellow head, which the child—who had been singularly quiet for some moments past—was resting sleepily against her mother's knee.

"Have you ever talked much about India to Brian—to my husband?" she asked abruptly.

"No," answered Lyon, evidently a trifle surprised by the unexpected question. "Not that I remember."

"You haven't said much to him in praise of the life out there?"

"As far as I can recollect, not a single word. You mustn't suppose that I am so deeply enamoured of the country as to be always sounding its praises," Lyon added, suddenly guessing the motive that had prompted her inquiries. "I could find plenty to say in its disparagement—if you prefer that Brian should hear it disparaged. You think he has still some hankering after an Indian appointment? But I understood from himself that, in deference to your wishes, he had quite abandoned the idea."

"I know! I know!" she responded hurriedly. "And he thought—he still thinks—he has given up the notion. But sometimes he—he works round again to plans he has discarded—you know he is impulsive by nature. So I am always afraid he might change his mind again. And then, I should either have to leave the children behind with strangers, or let him go out by himself for the first few years."

Lyon's reply was unexpectedly prompt and to the point. "Disagreeable alternatives. But you would choose the first, no doubt, if ever you had to choose at all?"

He saw her face harden visibly in the moonlight. "I cannot say," she answered, with a little catch in her breath. "The children need

me so very much at present. Brian could do without me, for a while, better than they."

"I rather doubt that, Mrs. Travers—if you'll excuse my rudeness in contradicting you. You don't know India—or Indian life. There's no place in the world—I speak advisedly—where a man stands so much in need of his wife, and of all the help his wife can give him."

Lyon spoke almost harshly. Doubtless the constraint he was putting upon himself at the moment helped to make his manner of speech unusually stern. Perhaps he was conscious of having assumed a somewhat unwarrantable tone, for he immediately added,—at once much more kindly and less seriously,—“But I hope you'll never have any choice of the kind to make. You may trust me to paint the entire Peninsula in the blackest possible hues to Brian, the very next time I chance to meet him.”

“Thank you”—mechanically. “I believe”—shaking off the abstraction which had fallen upon her during the last two or three minutes—“we ought to be going home; it must be very late. I ought not to have kept this child out so long; see, she is more than half asleep! Come, Dolly, my pet! wake up, and come home.”

“You will let me see you safely back?” Lyon suggested. “I believe the Berigo is not absolutely safe after nightfall—and, as you are alone”—

“Thanks, I am not going back by the Berigo,” she interrupted him quickly. “If the road had been our only way home, I shouldn't have felt

justified in lingering here so late. But there's a path through our padrone's olive-garden, which starts from that wicket"—pointing to a rude gate in the hedge bounding the farther side of the garden—"and leads straight to the back-door of the hotel. So you see we run no risks. Thanks very much, all the same. Good-night. Dolly, say good-night to Mr. Lyon."

Dolly, now thoroughly awake and ready for action, obeyed ; then she suffered herself to be led off without resistance. For a while, after she and her mother—leaving the moonlit garden of sweet scents, and Mr. Lyon, standing with the wicket-gate in his hand, behind them—had passed into the dusky shadow of the olive-grove, where the moonbeams shimmered mysteriously between motionless leaves on gnarled trunks and fantastically-contorted branches, she held fast to Dorothy's hand, a little overawed, no doubt, by the semi-darkness and strange unfamiliarity of her surroundings. But her awe was not long-lived. Soon, reassured, she began to prattle volubly of one thing and another ; and, at length, catching sight of a colony of glow-worms a few yards in advance, pulled her small fingers with a cry of delight from Dorothy's hold, and scampered eagerly forward. Her mother instantly hurried after and recaptured her.

"Don't run away to-night, my sweet," she said coaxingly. "Keep close to mother, and hold her hand all the while, there's a good little child. It's so dark, little Dolly, so very, very dark"—

Dolly yielded to this appeal—there had been far more of appeal than of command in Dorothy's tone—without demur, and, replacing her hand in her mother's, walked soberly beside her the rest of the way. That there had been something strange in this appeal, or in her mother's manner of making it, would seem, however, to have impressed itself upon her childish mind, for she presently looked up and demanded, with a seriousness which showed that she had been inwardly revolving the question for some minutes—

"Mummy, are you 'fraid of the dark? 'Cause I'm not 'fraid, you know; and I'll take care of you."

Dorothy stooped and kissed her suddenly. But she made no reply.

"*Are* you 'fraid?" persisted the child. "*Do* you want me to take care of you?"

Dorothy's hand closed more tightly upon the little fingers clinging to hers. "Yes," she said, almost under her breath. "I think I am a little afraid, Dolly—just a little. And I want you to take care of me, very much."

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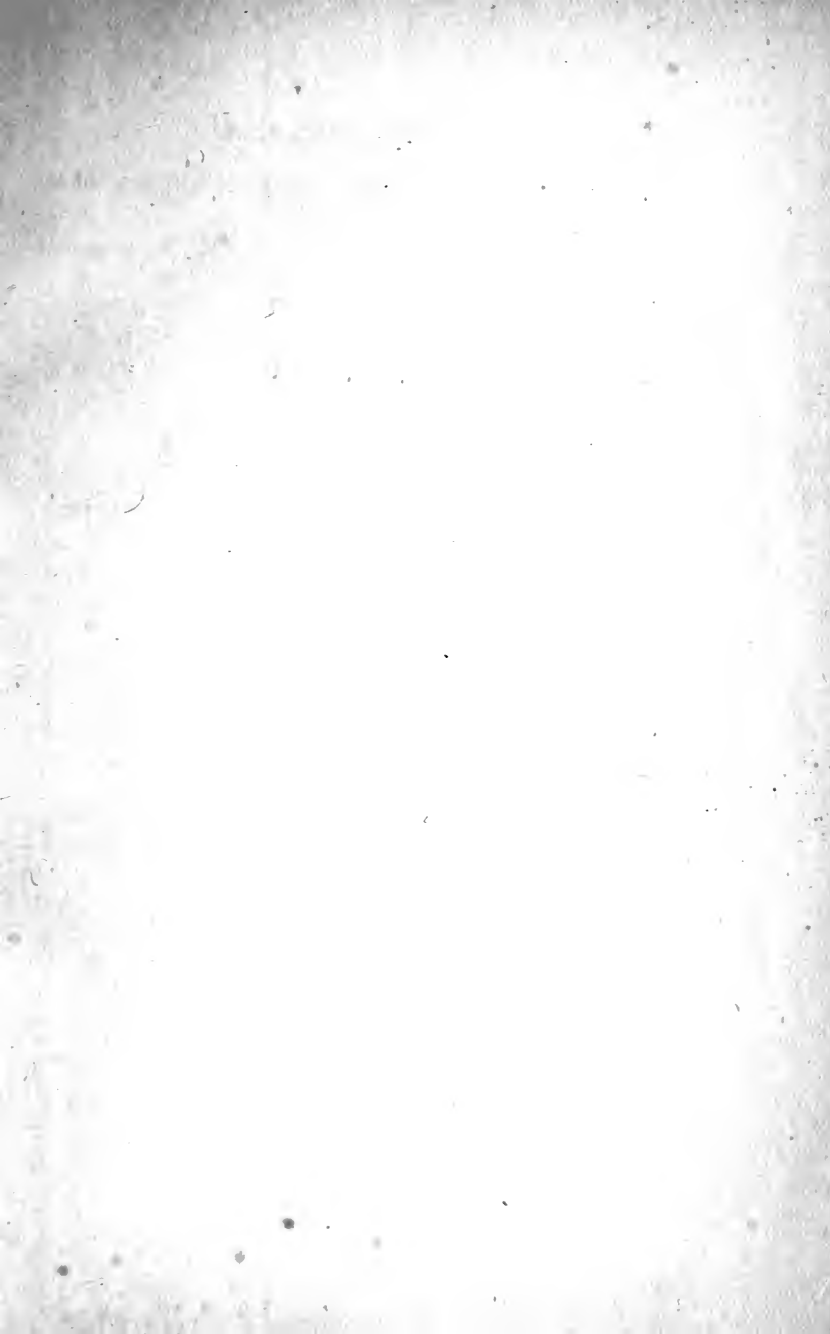
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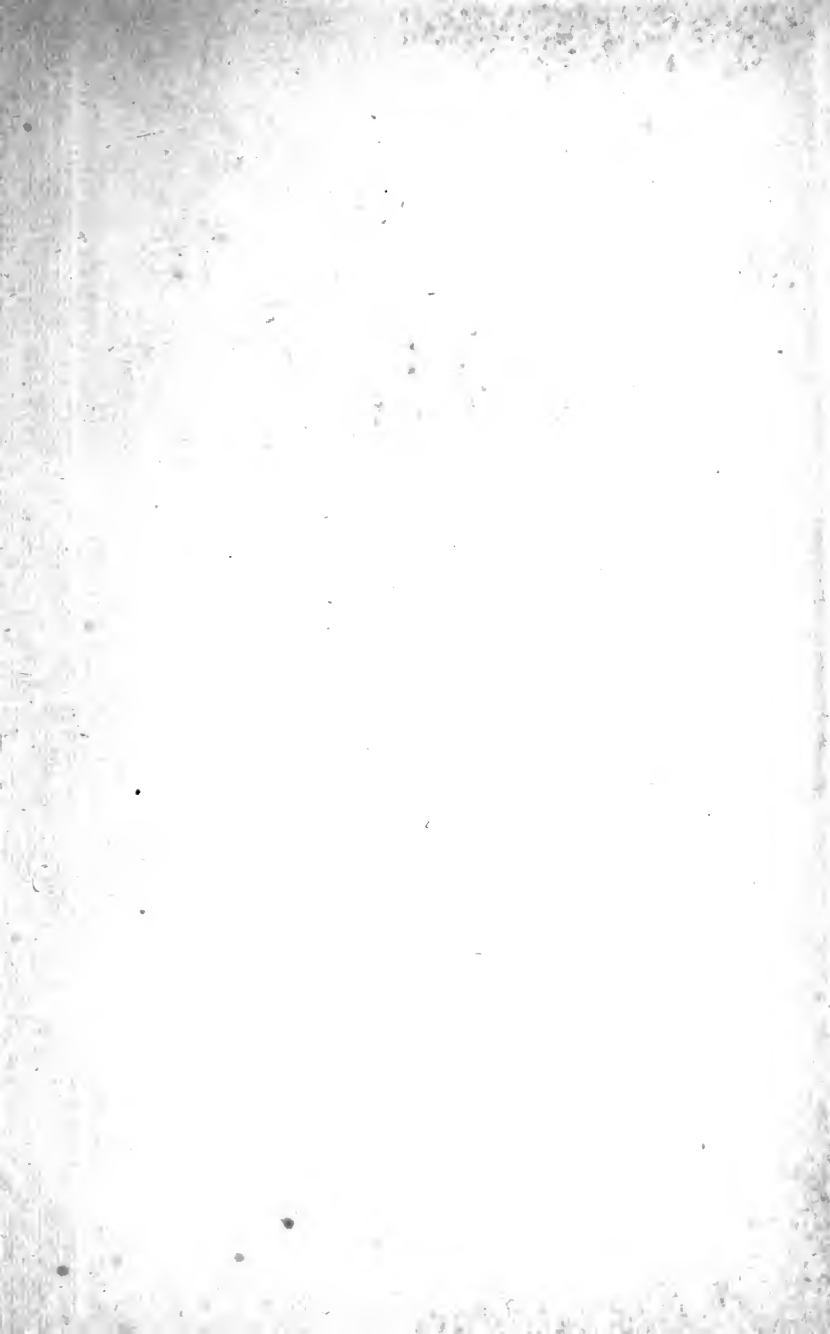
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